Statement of the Republic of Estonia at the General Debate of the UNGA 73rd Session of the First Committee, 9 October 2018

Mr Chairman,

Let me first congratulate you on assuming the Chairmanship of the 73rd Session of the First Committee. While aligning with the statement of the European Union, we would like to highlight some issues in our national capacity.

Mr Chairman,

As the Secretary General noted in his new Disarmament Agenda, we live in a world of unpredictability, tensions and ever changing security environment. The rules- and treaty -based multilateral system faces serious challenges. The war in Syria has lasted seven years with severe violations of human rights and repeated use of chemical weapons. In Europe, the aggression against Ukraine is a reminder that the fundamental principles of sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity have not been respected by all. The spectrum of security threats today is broader than ever – conventional military threats have not disappeared and hybrid threats, cyberattacks, terrorism, as well as proliferation and even use of weapons of mass destruction pose a pressing need to respond.

The proliferation of nuclear weapons and re-emergence of the use of other weapons of mass destruction remain serious threats. We are concerned about the continued use of chemical weapons in Syria. We reiterate our strong condemnation of the use of chemical weapons in the United Kingdom earlier this year. These attacks, both confirmed by the OPCW, are in grave violation of the international law. We deeply regret that the renewal of the mandate of the Joint Investigative Mechanism was vetoed in the Security Council. As there can be no impunity and those responsible must be held accountable, we welcome the decision of the Conference of States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention to enhance the OPCW’s capacity to identify the perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons and to develop a universal attribution mechanism. Furthermore, Estonia welcomes the efforts conducted within the framework of the Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons.
We call upon the DPRK to return to the compliance with its international obligations under the UN Security Council Resolutions. We welcome the ongoing diplomatic efforts with DPRK that have contributed to easing tensions. However, until the DPRK does not follow concrete steps towards denuclearisation, all States must continue strictly enforcing existing sanctions.

Estonia continues to support the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). We reiterate the need for Iran to continue abiding strictly by all its nuclear-related commitments and to cooperate fully with the IAEA.

Mr Chairman,

The NPT remains a true cornerstone of the global efforts to pursue nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation and peaceful use of nuclear energy. Estonia shares the ultimate goal of nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, a world without nuclear weapons, and continues to support the “Progressive Approach” to be pursued in a realistic and responsible way. To this end, Estonia supported both the 2016 resolutions on the Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty (FMCT) and on nuclear disarmament verification. Estonia actively participated in the work of the high-level FMCT expert preparatory group, and it is our hope that this process will bring us yet another step closer to the commencement of official negotiations.

We are concerned by the long-standing deadlock of the Conference on Disarmament (CD) and it is important to continue exploring ways for its revitalization. I would like to reiterate Estonia’s request to participate fully and equally in the disarmament discussions as a full member of the CD.

We urge all States, particularly those whose adherence is required for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty to enter into force, to sign and ratify the Treaty without further delay.

Mr Chairman,

Estonia recognises that cyber security has become a key issue in the context of international security. The role and involvement of the UN seeking a consensus on norms of responsible state behavior and cyber norms discussions in the First Committee are increasingly relevant. Over the years, the GGEs have reached consensus on a number of recommendations, which the General Assembly has repeatedly endorsed. It is our task as States, to fully implement these recommendations. Estonia supports further development of a strategic framework for conflict
prevention and stability in cyberspace that is based on international law, in particular the UN Charter, the development and implementation of universal norms of responsible state behaviour and regional confidence-building measures.

Mr Chairman,

Estonia supports the efforts to universalize and strengthen the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW). Regarding the Emerging Technologies in the Area of Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems, we are convinced that the CCW is the most appropriate forum of discussion. Estonia actively contributed to the work of the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) and we welcome the agreed Guiding Principles and renewing the current mandate of the GGE for 2019.

Illicit, poorly regulated or unregulated flows of arms and ammunition threaten peace and security, fuel terrorism and organised crime. In this context, Estonia welcomes the outcome of the Third Review Conference of the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons and the International Tracing Instrument. The 4th Conference of States Parties of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) in Tokyo has continued the progress in advancing a number of ATT goals. Universalisation, effective treaty implementation, strengthened cooperation with all stakeholders, awareness raising on gender-based violence are to be continuously pursued.

Estonia continues contributing to humanitarian demining and mine action. This includes support to the United Nations Mine Action Service, as well as to the humanitarian projects in bilateral and international frameworks. We also urge all States to join the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Treaty.

On a more general note, Estonia is concerned about the financial difficulties of several disarmament conventions and calls on all UN states to honour their financial responsibilities.

Finally, Estonia is determined to contribute to the global efforts to strengthen the international law and rules based order, and to the implementation of existing disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation instruments. Running for the UN Security Council for the period of 2020-21 demonstrates Estonia’s long-term commitment to take more responsibility in promoting international peace and security, and offer a small state’s perspective to the Council.

Thank you, Mr Chairman.