STATEMENT
by

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at the

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United Nations New York

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Mr Chair,

Let me congratulate you and other members of the bureau on your election to chair this year’s session of the First Committee. I can assure you of the Swedish delegation’s full cooperation. Sweden associates itself with the general statement by the European Union, as well as the one delivered on behalf of the Nordic countries. The following remarks are made in a national capacity.

Mr Chair,

The backdrop to this gathering is a tense and unpredictable global security environment. An uptick in global nuclear arsenals, for the first time since 1986, can soon be a reality – removing us further from the common goal of a world free of nuclear weapons. Among nuclear weapon states, modernization programs are underway, drawing on technological developments to improve capabilities of both warheads and delivery systems. The notion of enhanced usability is particularly worrying as it can blur the line between nuclear and conventional warfare, thereby lowering the nuclear threshold.

In seeking to revive disarmament diplomacy, we should make full use of the strong engagement by the UN Secretary General. His agenda for disarmament will inspire the UN system and it should inspire us, including to consistently apply a gender perspective and to involve civil society in our work.

Mr Chair,

We are about to enter the second half of the current NPT review cycle. With the Review Conference 2020 plainly in sight, and having spent two Prep Coms outlining national positions, we must now start to elaborate more concretely the desired outcome. From a Swedish perspective, a crucial element would be a declaration re-affirming our commitment to
the treaty itself and to obligations, including ones related to Article VI, undertaken at successive Review Conferences. To dispel any notion of usability of nuclear weapons, it should also make clear that "a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought". Such a policy statement should be underpinned by practical measures covering all three pillars of the treaty. Here, Sweden has previously pointed to nuclear risk reduction and transparency measures as potential common ground. Disarmament verification offers another promising avenue for cooperation, as it builds transparency and confidence. Transforming these ideas into concrete Summit deliverables will hinge on constructive engagement from nuclear weapon states themselves.

Mr Chair,

In following key regional proliferation dossiers, we are being reminded on a daily basis of how indispensable the IAEA safeguards system is. We must give it the necessary political and financial support, as well as the necessary inspection tools, including having the Additional Protocol universally applied. But the Agency is much more than a nuclear watchdog. It makes crucial contributions in areas such as health, food, agriculture and water purification. As a member of the Board of Governors, Sweden will be engaged in all areas of the IAEA’s broad mandate.

The continued implementation of the New START treaty remains of fundamental importance and the one bright spot in an otherwise bleak strategic arms control landscape. We call on the US and Russia to extend the New START to 2026. Meanwhile, concerns regarding Russia’s non-compliance regarding INF must be addressed.

As current regional proliferation crises indicate, increased attention must be paid to countering the spread of ballistic missile technology. The Hague Code of Conduct is designed specifically for this purpose. This voluntary arrangement, which Sweden is pleased to chair during 2018-2019, contributes transparency and builds confidence. We encourage
more states to join the 139 already subscribing to the code. Please join us for a side-event on the Hague Code of Conduct, on Friday 12 October.

Mr Chair,

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the Iran nuclear agreement, demonstrates the full potential of determined and sustained diplomacy. As the IAEA confirms by applying highly intrusive safeguards, Iran continues to fulfill its nuclear obligations under the agreement. As long as that is the case, the JCPOA effectively curtails Iran’s ability to develop nuclear weapons. Against this background, Sweden, and indeed the EU, deeply regrets the United States’ withdrawal from the agreement. Iran’s role in the region and missile activities are clearly matters of concern. They can and should however be addressed separately and not at the expense of the JCPOA.

The DPRK’s nuclear weapons and missiles programmes remain a major threat to the global non-proliferation regime. Diplomatic efforts in the past months deserve our full and active support. All parties must now work to maintain momentum. For the DPRK this means that commitments must be translated into legally binding undertakings, including through signing and ratifying the CTBT. Importantly, the IAEA should be given a role early in the verification of a denuclearization and disarmament process.

Mr Chair,

The recurrent use of chemical weapons has been an appaling recent trend, challening a norm we had come to view as well consolidated. In the past year, chemical warfare has once again occurred in Syria, an atrocity in the midst of a devastating humanitarian crisis. The deadlock on this issue in the UN Security Council, preventing it to attribute responsibility, has been a particularly depressing episode during Sweden’s period as a Council member. In Salisbury, a nerve agent was used in a reckless murder attempt, prompting an investigation to which Russia
should lend its full cooperation. Against this background, a lot is at stake as we approach the Chemical Weapons Convention Review Conference. The norm against chemical weapons use must be upheld and the OPCW given the means to conduct its work. Above all, we should do our utmost to avoid further politicization as it could seriously impair the organisation.

Mr Chair,

The vast number of casualties caused by Small Arms and Light Weapons should serve as a constant reminder of the need for further action. This past summer, the UN Programme of Action Review Conference resulted in good progress, not least as regards gender and the linkages to the UN Sustainable Development Goals. On other issues, ammunition among them, more needs to be done. Further universalization of the Arms Trade Treaty should also remain a priority. During 2018, constructive discussions have been conducted in the Group of Governmental Experts on the complex issue of lethal autonomous weapons system, or LAWS. These will need to continue, hopefully in a non-divisive manner and within the framework of existing international law, including international humanitarian law.

Mr Chair,

Multilateral institutions which have served us well for decades have come under unprecedented strain. Rather than undermining what has been meticulously constructed, now is the time to demonstrate – in words and deeds – our basic commitment to this framework. Hopefully, therefore, our deliberations here in New York can pave the way for concrete progress during the upcoming year. The global security situation demands nothing less.

Thank you!