Mr Chair,

Let me congratulate you on your election as chair of the First Committee, and assure you of the full support of my delegation.

In addition to the statements by the European Union and the Nordic countries, allow me to highlight a few key issues from a national perspective.

Mr Chair, dear colleagues,

Much has already been said about the difficult backdrop to our meeting this year. And rightly so. These are indeed trying times – for arms control and disarmament, and for multilateral cooperation in general.

One particularly fitting description of our current predicament is the one used by the President of the General Assembly, when he spoke of a trust deficit as a key concern for the world today. Hardly anywhere is this more evident, and more dangerous, than in the area of arms control. Building trust – or rather, rebuilding trust – must therefore be the main aim of our deliberations this year.

Strengthening the international arms control architecture requires trust and confidence among states, assurance that agreements are complied with, and accountability where that is not the case. It requires strong multilateral institutions and effective national implementation, supported by international capacity building efforts. To advance all of these is our shared responsibility – one that should guide all our work this autumn.

Mr Chair,

What are the steps that we most urgently need to take?

In nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, our focus must be on ensuring a successful NPT review. The discussions at the third PrepCom in May were useful in clarifying delegations’ positions. At this Committee session, we should continue efforts to identify common ground and areas for further work in view of the review conference next year.

For progress in nuclear disarmament, new and innovative thinking is needed. Finland is pleased to participate in both the Stepping stones initiative and the CEND dialogue. We welcome also the increased attention given to nuclear risk reduction. We have supported UNIDIR’s work on risk reduction and are pleased to host a side event with UNIDIR and other partners on the topic next week.
In an increasingly volatile environment, the predictability and stability that effective arms control instruments can bring, is more important than ever. The New START treaty with its comprehensive transparency mechanisms is a case in point. We call on the United States and Russia to extend New START. An early extension would provide the time needed for dialogue on new arrangements, including on non-strategic nuclear weapons.

Strengthening cooperation on nuclear security is also essential. Nuclear terrorism, for one, is a challenge we need to tackle together. Having served as international coordinator of the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism for the past two years, we are more convinced than ever of the value of the type of practical, hands-on cooperation it promotes. We encourage all countries, not yet members, to join the initiative.

Regarding chemical weapons, our most urgent priority is to uphold the norm against the use of chemical weapons and to ensure that those that violate it are held to account.

The first step towards accountability is attribution. Since last year, the OPCW has diligently implemented the tasking given to it to identify the perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons, and has done so in a professional, impartial and objective manner. For this, the dedicated OPCW staff deserves our full support and respect.

Instead, we have witnessed deliberate attempts to undermine the integrity of the organisation as a whole. This is simply unacceptable. Without strong institutions, there can be no effective treaty implementation. By undermining the independence of treaty organisations, we undermine the treaties themselves.

Going forward, it is our duty to ensure that the OPCW has the support and resources needed to implement its mandate in full. But even then, final responsibility for achieving accountability rests with the UN Security Council. We are yet to see the Council fully shoulder this responsibility.

Highlighting the importance of conventional arms control was one of the many merits of the Secretary General’s Agenda for Disarmament last year. On conventional arms, our task is clear: to ensure effective implementation of commitments made under the different instruments. In this, international assistance is often essential.

Finland is pleased to cooperate with UNIDIR on weapons and ammunition management and to support the valuable work of NGOs and civil society on small arms and light weapons, including by funding the UN Trust Facility, UNSCAR. We welcome the launch of the new Salient Fund later this month, and look forward to contributing to its work in the future.

As a longstanding supporter of humanitarian mine action we look forward to the review conference of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention in Oslo next month. We commend Norway for the excellent preparations ahead of the review.

The Arms Trade Treaty, five years after its entry into force, has already proven its worth. Promoting national implementation and the universalisation of the treaty remain key priorities. With over 100 States Parties so far, progress on universalisation has been remarkable. The recent announcement by China of aiming to accede to the treaty is particularly welcome. We hope it will encourage other major arms exporters and importers to join – in the region and beyond.

The ATT has a pioneering role as regards gender-based violence. We are very pleased that the importance of combatting gender-based violence and mainstreaming gender are increasingly highlighted also in the implementation of other arms control instruments. This is a key part of implementing our commitments under Security Council resolution 1325.
Similarly, the role of young people deserves additional attention in arms control, just as it does in the broader context of the UN’s work on peace and security.

Finland has engaged actively in the work of the Group of Governmental Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems. Our aim is an effective normative framework for LAWS, adopted by consensus by all parties to the process. It is an ambitious aim, but one that Finland will fully strive for. The 11 Guiding Principles agreed by the GGE are an excellent basis on which States can now begin building a practical outcome.

For negotiations on this extremely complex topic, the Geneva GGE is the appropriate forum – the only game in town. We support a new mandate for the GGE as proposed in August, with the clear aim of achieving concrete results by 2021. With patience and flexibility on all sides, we will be able to reach an outcome all parties can commit to. We should strive for nothing less.

Mr Chair,

With our overall objective in mind – strengthening the rules-based international system and the institutions that work to uphold it – we look forward to working with you and all delegations to make this session a success.

Thank you, Mr Chair.