Statement of the Netherlands
delivered by
H.E. Robbert Gabriëlse, Permanent Representative to the Conference on Disarmament
at
First Committee of the 74rd session of the
UN General Assembly

General Debate

New York, 14 October 2019
Chairperson,

Allow me to congratulate you on your election as chair to the First Committee. I would also like to congratulate the Bureau members on the assumption of their positions. The delegation of the Netherlands stands ready to support your work. In addition to the statement delivered by the EU, the Netherlands would like to make the following remarks in its national capacity.

Chairperson,

Today, we live in a world which is increasingly multipolar and where new technologies emerge. This brings about many complexities, posing a risk to global security. We need non-proliferation and disarmament more than ever. Sadly, we continue to see serious threats to the multilateral architecture. This year, we already witnessed the demise of the INF treaty. The JCPOA, a huge multilateral non-proliferation success, is under high pressure. The Chemical Weapons Convention is under strain as chemical weapons are being used by state and non-state actors. And the development of the DPRK’s nuclear and ballistic missile programmes continues to be a key challenge for the global non-proliferation regime.

These challenges can only be successfully resolved if we use our most important and effective tool at hand: multilateral cooperation. As noted by His Majesty the King Willem Alexander of the Netherlands in his remarks to the UN General Assembly this year, and I quote: “We should cherish the multilateral system and its international agreements and rules as a precious achievement. We need each other more than ever” –end of quote. The Netherlands will therefore continue to promote multilateralism as the key principle system to address today’s challenges and promote international security. Our efforts will therefore be constructive, forward-looking, and building on the fundamentals of the rules-based system. In that regard, the Netherlands supports the SG’s Agenda for Disarmament and continue to support the role of the UN to addressing these issues.

Chairperson,

Firstly, in terms of multilateral cooperation, we must put our strongest efforts in jointly upholding the existing nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament architecture. Therefore, the Netherlands continues to be strongly committed to the strengthening and implementation of the Non-Proliferation Treaty - The Netherlands will actively contribute to a successful outcome of the NPT Review Conference via our vice-presidency of the Conference and our chairmanship of Main Committee III. Furthermore, the Netherlands urges immediate start of negotiations on an FMCT next year. We fully support efforts to realize a follow-up process for the successfully concluded GGE on nuclear disarmament verification this year. We hope that this Committee can stay united in continuing this important multilateral effort.
Chairperson,

Secondly, this year the INF treaty could not survive due to the lack of implementation by only one side. This has serious implications for stability and security in the Euro-Atlantic region, and together with Allies and partners the Netherlands will take balanced, coordinated and defensive measures in response. We remain committed to dialogue and effective arms control.

UNSC-resolution 2231, which consolidates the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, is under increasing pressure today. Iran’s nuclear programme must remain under strict international controls for which the JCPOA is the agreed instrument. We call upon all parties to fully implement UNSC-resolution 2231, including the elements on ballistic missile related activities.

Diplomatic efforts to address the proliferation challenges posed by the DPRK must be actively supported by the international community. We cannot accept a nuclear DPRK. The most recent ballistic missile test by the DPRK is another clear violation of UNSC resolutions and suggests further advancement of its capabilities – the international community must maintain pressure on the DPRK, including full and effective implementation of sanctions by all UN member states.

Together, we all agree that we must uphold the global norm against the use of chemical weapons. If we want the OPCW to retain and strengthen its crucial role, we must not let political moves get in the way.

Chairperson,

Thirdly, new technologies come with great opportunities. Cyberspace, artificial intelligence and biotechnology come with many societal and economic benefits. However, these technologies can generate security challenges. Malicious cyber operations disrupting our societies is a real, credible threat. We reject the development of fully autonomous weapons systems, which are not under meaningful human control.

We need collective engagement to address these developments. The Netherlands believes that this can be done effectively by strong adherence to existing and agreed upon norms, rules and principles. As such, the Netherlands supports the current multilateral efforts to tackle cyber security threats, in both the OEWG and the GGE. We welcome the constructive discussion in the meeting of the OEWG held in September. We need a pragmatic and inclusive approach, in such a way that the OEWG and the GGE will complement and reinforce each other.

With regard to Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems: again multilateralism is key here. We commend the important work of the GGE on this issue; the Netherlands welcomes the outcomes of this year’s sessions. However, there is much work still to be done, and therefore we trust to see the mandate
renewed in November.
The same is true for countering biosecurity threats: The Netherlands is committed to the
strengthening and implementation of the BTWC, including through confidence-building measures and
peer review.

Chairperson,

Fourthly, the vast number of casualties caused by conventional weapons should serve as a reminder
for the need for collective action. The extensive use of anti-personnel mines of an improvised nature,
particularly in urban areas, and the illicit cross-border flow of small arms and light weapons into
conflict zones, are painful but clear proof of that.
Therefore, the Netherlands remains fully committed to the several conventions and treaties that seek
to achieve progress in this field. The Netherlands will actively contribute to the Review Conference of
the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention.

The Netherlands supports the universalization and implementation of the Convention on Cluster
Munitions. Only through our work in this convention can we uphold the norm on non-use of cluster
munitions.

We underline the importance of implementation and universalization of the Arms Trade Treaty. In this
regard, we regret one states’ intention to withdraw its signature from the ATT. We call on all UN
member states to join the Arms Trade Treaty, as our only legally-binding international instrument to
regulate trade of conventional arms.

Chairperson,

And fifthly, we should work on improving and modernising our disarmament machinery. It is a sad
truth that the very Conference that produced our vital multilateral disarmament treaties, is not able to
start negotiations on, for example, a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty. We have to be creative in order to
move forward. The Netherlands has therefore introduced a working paper on the organization of our
work in the CD, namely to go ‘back to basics’. Hopefully, this will give a impetus for substantial work
in the CD next year.

It is our shared responsibility that our most important conventions, in the realm of disarmament and
non-proliferation, function effectively. We urge all States parties to meet their financial obligations to
those Conventions in full and on time.

Chairperson,

As I said, we can only tackle these challenges through multilateral cooperation. Only our shared
commitment, a constructive approach and some creativity can ensure the effectiveness of our
multilateral institutions, of our international rules-based order, and our non-proliferation and disarmament architecture. We must act together.

The full version of the statement will be uploaded to Papersmart.

Thank you.