STATEMENT

delivered by

Ms. Ann-Sofie Nilsson
Ambassador for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation, Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Sweden

at the

General Debate of the First Committee, 74th session of the UN General Assembly, United Nations

New York

October 2019

- CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY -
Chair,

Let me congratulate you on your election to chair this year’s session of the First Committee. I can assure you of the full support of the Swedish delegation.

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.

Chair,

The deteriorating global security environment and its implications for global disarmament and non-proliferation have been a recurring theme in this forum in recent years – and for good reason. Developments following last year’s First Committee can only reinforce the assessment that disarmament diplomacy is on a dangerous trajectory. Milestone treaties and agreements are abandoned or face an uncertain future; well-established norms and the integrity of multilateral institutions are being challenged, just when we need them the most.

New nuclear capabilities, including ones apparently designed for military use, are being developed, removing us further from our collective goal of a world free of nuclear weapons. The risk of another nuclear arms race and for actual nuclear use – intentional or otherwise – can no longer be ignored. Nor can the indisputable fact that a single nuclear explosion would cause catastrophic humanitarian consequences.

In seeking to revive disarmament diplomacy, we should make full use of the strong engagement by the UN Secretary-General, whose Agenda for Disarmament is call to action to the UN system which should inspire us all. Having signed on as champion for dialogue and
gender, Sweden is looking forward to working with the UN in delivering on this important project.

Chair,

Six months from now, NPT members will gather here in New York for the 2020 Review Conference. Earlier this year, Sweden launched an initiative specifically aimed at mobilizing political momentum for an ambitious yet realistic outcome of the Review Conference. 16 non-nuclear weapon states, representing different geographical and security-policy perspectives, gathered in Stockholm to convey a political message on the need for disarmament progress. In close dialogue with nuclear and non-nuclear weapon states, our group will seek to make concrete contributions to this end.

From a Swedish point of view, elements in a possible common ground package should be:

- a re-affirmation of the position of the NPT as the cornerstone of the global nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime;

- a re-affirmation of the continued validity of previous commitments made within the NPT framework – there can be no backtracking;

- a contemporary version of the Reagan-Gorbachev dictum “a nuclear war can never be won and must never be fought”;

- a package of measures covering all three pillars of the treaty, which include progress in implementation of outstanding Article VI-related commitments;

- and, finally, an enhanced framework for systematic follow-up in the years beyond 2020. In this context, improved secretarial
support for the treaty’s disarmament dimension deserves to be considered.

A particular challenge will be to identify “actionable” Article VI-related measures – measures which are viable in the current security environment and which can contribute to reducing nuclear risks, while at the same time creating scope for bigger disarmament steps down the road. The Stepping Stones Approach was introduced with this in mind: how can we design a strategy which makes implementation of outstanding disarmament commitments possible?

There are several areas which offer rich opportunities for concrete measures. They include:

- reducing the role of nuclear weapons in policies and doctrines, including by strengthening negative security assurances;
- reviving habits of cooperation, building on the fruitful interaction between nuclear and non-nuclear weapon states on disarmament verification;
- ways of enhancing transparency on arsenals and fissile material stocks;
- and measures designed to reduce risks of intentional or unintentional nuclear use.

Chair,

The Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty constitutes a crucial part of the international disarmament and non-proliferation regime. Its entry-into-force remains an item at the top of the disarmament community’s “to do-list”. Sweden’s strong political and technical support to CTBT is steadfast. We urge all remaining annex 2 states to
take concrete steps towards ratification. Pending entry-into-force, all existing moratoria on nuclear test explosions must be maintained.

With its confidence-building interaction between nuclear and non-nuclear weapon states, disarmament verification stands out as one of the success stories of recent years. Sweden is proud to be engaged in the IPNDV and the QUAD projects, both of which continue to deliver concrete insights into future verification requirements. We strongly encourage more nuclear and non-nuclear weapon states to engage.

Chair,

Sweden participated actively in the negotiations in 2017 that led to the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition on Nuclear Weapons. At that time, we voiced our concern regarding certain shortcomings in the draft. In July this year, the government announced that Sweden, largely due to those same shortcomings, will refrain from signing or seeking ratification of the TPNW in its current form. We will, however, seek to become an observer state once the treaty enters into force.

Chair,

Recent arms control developments add to an already gloomy picture. Sweden deeply regrets the termination of the INF, a treaty which contributed immensely to European and global security for over 30 years. Its demise was fundamentally triggered by Russian non-compliance. One important ray of light remains however: the New START which, as far as can be told, continues to be fully implemented. We call on the United States and Russia, overwhelmingly the two largest nuclear weapons possessors, to come to an early agreement on a five-year extension of the New START – a crucial component of strategic stability and key scene setter for the NPT Review Conference. An extended New START
would also provide the appropriate platform for negotiating a successor treaty, covering strategic and non-strategic warheads and which takes into account relevant technological developments. Dismantling the one remaining safety net before a new one is erected could seriously jeopardize global security.

Chair,

In following key regional proliferation dossiers, we are constantly reminded of IAEA’s indispensable role for global non-proliferation. Sweden is proud to serve as chair of the Board of Governors in 2019-2020. We must give the agency the necessary political and financial support, as well as adequate inspection tools, including by having the Additional Protocol universally applied. But the agency is more than a nuclear watchdog. It makes crucial contributions in areas such as health, food and agriculture and water purification – delivering on its updated motto “atoms for peace and development”.

The DPRK’s nuclear and missiles programmes remain a major threat to the global non-proliferation regime. We welcome the diplomatic developments since early 2018, a momentum which must be maintained. The DPRK should formalize its commitments towards denuclearization in a complete, verifiable and irreversible manner, including by signing and ratifying the CTBT.

Sweden, and the EU, remain steadfast supporters of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). A disintegration of the agreement would be seriously damaging for the global non-proliferation regime. Recent Iranian breaches of nuclear-related limits under the JCPOA are serious setbacks in this regard. Meanwhile, we deeply regret the withdrawal of the United States from the JCPOA and the re-imposition of sanctions. We urge Iran to
cooperate fully - and in a timely manner - with the IAEA in the implementation of its NPT Safeguards Agreement.

Chair,

The upcoming year will be a crucial one for nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. The NPT Review Conference offers as chance to unlock disarmament diplomacy that must be seized. If we are to succeed, nuclear and non-nuclear weapon states alike must now engage fully and in a spirit of compromise. Constructive discussions in this forum would be a good start.

Thank you!