Statement by H.E. Archbishop Bernardito Auza
Apostolic Nuncio, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations
Seventy-fourth Session of the United Nations General Assembly
First Committee: General and complete disarmament

New York, 18 October 2019

Mr. Chair,

I congratulate you on your assumption of the chair and ensure our cooperation in pursuing the Committee’s vital work to advance international peace and security.

Our discussion on general and complete disarmament comes after the significant events, held during the recently concluded High-Level Week of the General Assembly, of the XI Conference to Facilitate the Entry into Force of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty and the General Assembly High-Level Plenary Meeting to commemorate and promote the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons. With regard to the latter, I wish to, once again, recall the words that Pope Francis addressed to the participants of a 2017 Symposium held in the Vatican, when he said, “the threat of the use [of nuclear weapons], as well as their very possession, is to be firmly condemned. For they exist in the service of a mentality of fear that affects not only the parties in conflict but the entire human race.” He called on the international community not to be beguiled by the false sense of security engendered by nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction; rather, as members of the one human family, to base their security on the fundamental principles of universal fraternity and solidarity.

This Committee considers a wide spectrum of specific concepts and proposals to achieve the elimination of nuclear weapons. The Holy See urges their detailed examination with the objective of establishing — by consensus to the greatest extent possible — actionable steps to reduce the prominence of nuclear weapons in global security through verifiable measures, towards the achievement of a nuclear-weapon-free world. My Delegation urges governments possessing nuclear weapons to reconsider any plans to “modernize” nuclear capabilities, whether for missiles, aircraft, submarines, or warheads. These developments risk expanding instead of reducing the role of nuclear weapons in global security. The Holy See also strongly urges all governments concerned to ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), so that it may finally enter into force as a bulwark against the further development of nuclear weapons, and as a necessary complement to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).
Mr. Chair,

The United Nations has no lack of fora where components of nuclear disarmament can be considered and negotiated. The Disarmament Commission has nuclear disarmament, transparency and confidence-building measures for outer space on its current agenda. It is well positioned to meet its goals. Indeed, transparency and confidence-building measures for outer space will strengthen stability by protecting the monitoring and verification assets that help make disarmament obligations function reliably.

At the same time, it is unfortunate that the Conference on Disarmament has been unable, for years, to agree on further steps in support of the elimination of nuclear weapons. Its members have the serious responsibility to work together to overcome this impasse. Mounting tensions in South Asia have increased the risks of armed conflict between nuclear-armed neighbors. Agreement to cease the production of fissile materials for nuclear weapons would help reduce such risks. All nuclear-weapons-possessing States are members of the Conference on Disarmament. With greater determination, the Conference could begin negotiations on steps that would move the world toward a security paradigm in which nuclear weapons are no longer present. Furthermore, modifications of conventional forces related to nuclear weapons for deterrence purposes should also be brought under negotiation. Both nuclear and conventional forces fall under the purview of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), whose Article VI demands the achievement of nuclear disarmament within the context of “general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control.”

Mr. Chair,

I conclude by recognizing the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification, in which the Holy See participates as an Observer. This important confidence-building effort, which has been under way for some time, provides input for verification mechanisms that support the objective of strengthening global security without reliance on nuclear weapons.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.