Mr. Chairman,

Let me congratulate you upon the assumption of your function and assure you of my delegation’s full support. Belgium aligns itself with the statement made on behalf of the EU and with the statement on the progressive approach made by the representative of Australia. Allow me to make the following national points. In the interest of time, I will not dwell on important subjects tackled in the aforementioned declarations and which we fully endorse, such as the need for an FMCT or the issue of nuclear disarmament verification.

Faced with an increasingly complex security environment and lackluster progress on nonproliferation issues, it is easy to be dismissive of the prospect of this review process scoring any breakthrough. After all, the review conference of 2015 did not end well. Since the end of that conference the DPRK has conducted 3 new nuclear tests and launched numerous missiles. The nuclear deal with Iran is currently under risk of unraveling. Last year’s negotiations on a nuclear ban treaty was testimony to the heightened polarization within the non-proliferation community. All these setbacks happened against the backdrop of the reemergence of the “Great Power competition.”

However, reluctance to meaningfully engage in this review process is not the answer to the multiple challenges we face. The grave security situation and
the confrontation between some of the nuclear weapon states have rendered progress on the disarmament field more difficult. Progress is still possible, though it will not be achieved through a divisive process. Nor will new initiatives automatically lead to results. For there is no lack of action plans, but a lack of action itself.

The action plan agreed at the review conference in 2010 still offers a firm footing for progress in all three clusters of the NPT. There is never an inappropriate time to discuss nuclear risk reduction. Measures to prevent accidental or unauthorized use have to be taken. Wherever possible, nuclear weapons should be taken off high alert. Some nuclear weapon states, such as the US, have made great strides in increasing transparency on their nuclear arsenal and doctrine. European nuclear weapon states have decreased their stockpiles and delivery systems. We are waiting for other states to follow suit.

Mr. Chairman,

International norms are not created overnight. They demand sustained political will and need to be underpinned by legal instruments. Only one country still violates the international taboo against nuclear tests. It is one exception too much. Moreover, voluntary moratoria on nuclear testing do not ensure a permanent and fully verifiable legal norm. We need the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty to enter into force. States should not wait for others to join the Treaty. Whether or not they belong to Annex II, all states should undertake the necessary political and legal steps making adherence possible. Only through an increased support to the CTBT can we pave the way towards a world free of nuclear tests, including in the DPRK. Pledges to refrain from nuclear tests are a welcome but insufficient step. This commitment should become legally binding and verifiable through full and unconditional adherence to the CTBT.

Creating international norms is not sufficient. They have to be verified and non-compliance should not remain without consequence. The Chemical Weapons Convention serves as a grim reminder that even an almost universally accepted norm that is verified by an international organization can suffer erosion when states parties refuse to play by the rules.

Mr. Chairman,
For decades, the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) has been a linchpin of European security. Though most European states are not party to this Treaty, all of them benefit from the protection it offers. The continued compliance with this Treaty is therefore of critical importance. We call upon Russia to continue the dialogue with the US to address the concerns raised by its development of a new missile system. Current issues regarding the INF have to be tackled in a way that preserves this crucial Treaty. We also express the hope that the protection against the threat of intermediate-range missiles Europe currently enjoys can one day be extended to other continents of the world.

Mr. Chairman,

The benefits of the peaceful use of the atom are manifold. Beyond providing an energy source, the atom can also combat malicious insects or sterilize food products. In the field of cancer therapy, the role that medical radioisotopes play remains irreplaceable. As a world market leader in the production of medical radioisotopes, Belgium shall continue to take all measures to ensure uninterrupted delivery to the millions of patients who rely on them for diagnosis and treatment.

The full range of peaceful nuclear applications should remain accessible to all states. Nuclear technology has not reached its full potential yet, especially in developing states. Therefore, Belgium applauds the important role the International Atomic Energy Agency is playing, notably through its Technical Cooperation Fund.

However, benefits should be paired with responsibilities. The IAEA should be able to use the full toolset to control each state’s nuclear programme and to detect any possible diversion to a weapons programme. This requires a comprehensive safeguards agreement, coupled with an Additional Protocol. The “golden standard” may pose a certain burden on states, but this cannot be an excuse to any state for not accepting the full-spectrum guarantee of the peaceful nature of its nuclear programme.