Thank you, Chairperson,

South Africa associates itself with the statements delivered on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, the African Group and the New Agenda Coalition. To this, I wish to add a few additional remarks in my national capacity.

Chairperson,

My delegation continues to believe that nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation are mutually reinforcing processes and therefore progress in respect of both is essential to realise the object and purpose of the NPT. We are therefore concerned over the lack of significant progress on nuclear disarmament and the tendency by some States to select and focus on preferred provisions of the Treaty.

Our own experience has shown that neither the possession, nor the pursuit of nuclear weapons can enhance international peace and security. The idea that nuclear weapons provide some sort of an ultimate security guarantee only serves to weaken arguments against proliferation and the development of nuclear weapons by those who tend to use the very same arguments to justify their decision to pursue nuclear weapons.

During the last few years we have continued to witness attempts by some States to negate and reinterpret the nuclear disarmament commitments made since the 1995 Review and Extension Conference. Together with modernisation programmes and deterrence arguments, this has continued to polarise the nuclear non-proliferation regime.

Chairperson,

As long as nuclear weapons exist, and vertical and horizontal proliferation persists, the threat to humanity will remain. The only way to eliminate this threat is to eliminate all nuclear weapons. Article VI of the NPT makes it clear that nuclear disarmament is an obligation on all States Parties. It is therefore a shared responsibility of all States to
prevent any use of nuclear weapons, to curb their proliferation and to achieve nuclear disarmament.

The adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) through an inclusive multilateral process within the United Nations framework therefore reflects the concerns of the international community with regard to nuclear weapons. This Treaty represents the highest non-proliferation standard that any State can commit to, thereby strengthening and complementing the NPT. This was also the reason why it was acknowledged by the Nobel Peace Committee in 2017.

South Africa’s support for the Treaty is without prejudice to the realization of existing nuclear disarmament obligations and commitments, including those agreed to in the NPT context and other partial measures, such as the entry-into-force of the CTBT, and a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons and other nuclear explosive devices.

Chairperson,

We firmly believe that the goals of the NPT can never be achieved if it is seen only as a means to protect the perceived security concerns of a few countries. This is not only illogical, but also lacks credibility. The indefinite retention of nuclear weapons on the basis of the perceived security interests of a few States comes at the expense of the rest of us. Such justifications merely encourage proliferation, contradict nuclear disarmament obligations and commitments, and ultimately undermine the NPT.

Nuclear weapons are inhumane weapons, and it is inconceivable that their use could ever, under any circumstances, be consistent with international law, particularly international humanitarian law. South Africa has always emphasised the humanitarian imperatives that underpin our search for a world without the threat posed by the possession, use and proliferation of these weapons. These considerations must be at the core of all deliberations, actions and decisions on nuclear weapons.

It is therefore regrettable that vast public resources are still being diverted towards the modernization of nuclear weapons, whilst basic human needs in many developing countries cannot be met. The development of new categories of nuclear weapons and their delivery systems provide a clear indication that some of the NWS continue to harbour aspirations for the indefinite retention of these instruments of destruction, contrary to their legal obligations and commitments.

Chairperson,

The 2010 NPT Review Conference not only reconfirmed the continued validity of the outcomes of the 1995 and 2000 Review Conferences, but also included an extensive Action Plan aimed at accelerating the implementation of all Treaty provisions under the three Treaty pillars. Urgent action is required to fully implement the commitments and undertakings entered into at the 1995, 2000 and 2010 Review Conferences. South Africa
believes that concrete progress on these solemn undertakings is essential to the success of the 2020 review cycle.

In this regard, we continue to believe that the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones (NWFZs) constitutes an important disarmament and non-proliferation measure and therefore support the establishment of new zones, including in the Middle East, but also in other regions such as Europe. In this regard, we note that the TPNW also provides an opportunity for those States that are not located in nuclear-weapon-free zones to join an instrument that expresses total opposition to nuclear weapons.

Chairperson,

The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) remains an important element of the set of mutually-reinforcing instruments aimed at accomplishing our common goals of nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation. Pending its entry into force, we urge all nuclear-weapon States to observe their moratoria on nuclear testing and not to undertake any actions that would undermine the CTBT. We believe that the CTBT’s entry into force would enhance the nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament regime and strengthen the role of multilateralism in arms control and international security.

The CTBT was the last Treaty to be negotiated at the Conference on Disarmament. However, since then the CD has fallen into a prolonged stalemate. We believe that the impasse in the CD undermines its credibility and raises questions about the Conference’s continued relevance. The CD was established for the purpose of conducting multilateral disarmament negotiations. Anything short of this objective means that the Conference is not executing its mandate.

In conclusion Chairperson,

We dare not become complacent about the threat posed by nuclear weapons and the lack of full implementation of the disarmament obligations flowing from Article VI. States Parties must respect the Treaty and the outcomes of its Review Conferences to maintain the continued vitality of this important legal instrument. Measurable progress, in particular on nuclear disarmament, must therefore remain our goal and a major determinant in achieving - and in sustaining - international peace and security.

I thank you, Chairperson.