Statement by the Republic of South Africa during the Cluster 2: Safeguards and Nuclear Non-Proliferation Debate during the Preparatory Committee for the 2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

27 April 2018

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Chairperson,

I associate myself with the statement delivered on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and would like to share some additional views in my national capacity.

As already pointed out in our statement during the General Debate, South Africa believes that nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation are mutually reinforcing processes and that both elements are essential to attain - and maintain - a world free of nuclear weapons. We therefore strongly support efforts aimed at promoting nuclear non-proliferation, provided that such efforts do not result in conditionalities being imposed on access to technology for peaceful purposes to countries, especially developing countries.

My delegation therefore supports the International Atomic Agency’s (IAEA) efforts to strengthen its safeguards system. We believe that this will contribute to mutual confidence in the peaceful nature of a State’s nuclear activities and the absence of undeclared nuclear activities or material. It is our view that strengthened safeguards should facilitate the transfer of nuclear technology and the peaceful use of nuclear energy to the benefit of developing countries. Nuclear energy not only provides for the expanded opportunity to generate power for our development, but we also derive benefit from its application in areas such as health, nutrition and agriculture.

Chairperson,

The IAEA remains the only internationally recognized competent authority responsible for verifying and assuring compliance with NPT safeguards agreements. In this regard, it remains South Africa’s view that the Additional Protocol is an indispensable instrument which enables the IAEA to build confidence and provide credible assurances regarding the absence of undeclared nuclear material and activities. Whilst the conclusion of an Additional Protocol remains a voluntary act by sovereign States, it is an extremely important confidence building measure, specifically in States with advanced nuclear programmes and facilities.
South Africa continues to work closely with the Agency with regard to safeguards implementation in the country. Having drawn the broader conclusions in South Africa for the first time in 2010, confirming that there was no indication of diversion of declared nuclear material from peaceful nuclear activities and no indication of undeclared nuclear material or activities, the IAEA started implementing the Integrated Safeguards approach in July 2015. We are pleased that South Africa continues to maintain its broader conclusion.

Considering the significant costs of implementing safeguards globally, my delegation has always held the view that the implementation of integrated safeguards was intended to ensure savings through the reduction of inspections in the field and which would in turn decrease the burden on the Member State given the decrease in Agency staff inspections. We trust that a cost benefit analysis will bear this out in the long term.

Chairperson,

It is regrettable that little progress has been made to implement the actions agreed to at the 2010 NPT RevCon in the development of appropriate legally-binding verification arrangements with the IAEA to ensure the irreversible removal of fissile material designated by each nuclear-weapon State as no longer required for military purposes. Neither has there been progress with regard to additional declarations of stockpiles of fissile material that could be used in nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.

Chairperson

We need to strengthen the multilateral institutions responsible for disarmament and non-proliferation issues, and be vigilant against any steps that could undermine the determination of the international community as a whole, to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons. However, we should not forget that even if all civilian materials were safeguarded and fully secured to the highest standards, this would only cover an estimated 15% of the weaponsusable material around the world, leaving a critical gap in the nuclear non-proliferation architecture. Hence, we should not lose sight of the remaining 85%, which is categorized as military materials that are not subject to any international security standards or oversight mechanisms.

We should therefore remain vigilant of the risks inherent in the continued existence of nuclear weapons and high-risk, unsafeguarded material that fall outside international oversight, as well as those posed by nuclear terrorism, the illicit nuclear network and criminal acts aimed at using nuclear or other radioactive material for malicious acts. For its part, South Africa remains committed to maintaining effective nuclear non-proliferation controls consistent with its international obligations, and to cooperating with other States to combat the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

I thank you, Chairperson.