STATEMENT DELIVERED DURING THE GENERAL DEBATE OF THE THIRD PREPARATORY COMMITTEE OF THE TREATY ON THE NON-PROLIFERATION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS (NPT PREPCOM), HELD IN NEW YORK, MONDAY, 29 APRIL 2019

Chairperson,

On the 27th April this year, South Africa marked its 25th year of uninterrupted democratic dispensation; this milestone has been achieved on the foundation laid by our great struggle leaders, such as the global icon President Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela. I therefore commence my remarks today with a quotation from this illustrious son of Africa when in his last address to the United Nations General Assembly, in 1998 he said;

"We must ask the question, which might sound naive to those who have elaborated sophisticated arguments to justify their refusal to eliminate these terrible and terrifying weapons of mass destruction - why do they need them anyway!"

As we approach the 50th Anniversary of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 2020, which will indeed coincide with the NPT 2020 Review Conference, my delegation would like to, at the onset, express its hope and wish for a progressive Third Session of the NPT Preparatory Committee and a successful NPT Review Conference in 2020. As the South African delegation, we associate with the statements delivered on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, the African Group and the New Agenda Coalition.

South Africa has consistently reiterated that far from guaranteeing global security, nuclear weapons exacerbate instability. Therefore, the only guarantee for global and regional security is their total elimination. As long as these weapons exist, and vertical and horizontal proliferation persists, the world will continue to face the threat of annihilation. The continued possession of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction serve as a catalyst for further proliferation.
Chairperson,

The 2010 NPT Review Conference reaffirmed the continued validity of the outcomes of 1995 and 2000, particularly the unequivocal undertaking by the Nuclear-Weapon States to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals and the agreement to apply the principles of transparency, irreversibility and verifiability in fulfilment of Treaty obligations. South Africa believes that the undertakings, including the extensive 2010 Action Plan under all three Treaty pillars, remain valid until fully implemented.

However, today States Parties remain seriously concerned about the lack of progress in respect of nuclear disarmament. For this reason, South Africa believes that the success of 2020 will be determined by the extent to which these undertakings by the NWS are being honoured.

We regret that little concrete progress has been achieved in the area of nuclear disarmament since 2010. Whilst reductions are important, they do not substitute for concrete, transparent, irreversible and verifiable nuclear disarmament measures. Ongoing modernisation programmes, including in relation to delivery systems, make it clear that some States still wish to indefinitely retain these instruments of destruction, contrary to their legal obligations and political commitments. This undermines the NPT bargain and also the non-proliferation norms established by the Treaty. South Africa therefore welcomed the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in July 2017 and ensured that we ratified it on 25 February this year, becoming the 22nd States Party to the Treaty. We believe that the Treaty represents one of the most important developments in the area of nuclear weapons disarmament since 1945. South Africa commits itself to work tirelessly towards the Treaty’s entry-into-force as soon as possible. Nevertheless, it must be reiterated the TPNW does not and should not distract attention from an objective assessment of the progress made in the implementation of the 1995, 2000 and 2010 NPT outcomes or in the 2020 Review.

Chairperson,

South Africa believes that the strengthened safeguards system remains an essential element of our collective efforts to address the threat posed by the proliferation of nuclear weapons. Such strengthened safeguards would contribute to establishing confidence in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy which, in turn, would greatly facilitate the transfer of nuclear technology and use of nuclear energy to the benefit of developing countries.

We therefore maintain our principled position that States Parties must conclude Comprehensive Safeguards Agreements with the IAEA as required under the Treaty, whilst viewing the Additional Protocol as an indispensable instrument to enable the IAEA to provide credible assurances regarding the absence of undeclared nuclear material and activities in a State.
Chairperson,

South Africa welcomes the efforts made towards sustaining the JCPOA with Iran. In this regard, we call on all the remaining parties involved to continue fulfilling their obligations under the agreement. Equally we recognize the 13 IAEA reports maintaining that Iran continues to meet its obligations on nuclear related matters under the JCPOA and UNSC resolution 2231.

Furthermore, we wish to renew our commitment to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), which constitutes an effective nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation measure by contributing to constraining the qualitative improvement of current nuclear weapons and ending the development of new types of nuclear weapons. We call upon those states whose ratification is necessary for the Treaty to enter into force, which are listed in Annex II of the CTBT, to sign and or ratified the treaty, without further delay.

Chairperson,

As an African country it would be amiss of my delegation not to recognize the commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the entry into force of the Treaty of Pelindaba, the African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty. We believe that such zones enhance global and regional peace and security, strengthen the nuclear non-proliferation regime and contribute towards realizing the objectives of nuclear disarmament. South Africa also supports the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones in parts of the world where they do not yet exist, particularly in the Middle East. We therefore welcome all initiatives to further this goal, and urge all States to redouble their efforts towards convening a Conference on this important issue involving all States of the region without any further delay. In this regard we welcome the Decision 73/546 of the UN General Assembly during the 73rd Session entitled “Convening a Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and other Weapons of Mass Destruction.

Chairperson,

We also welcome the recently held Summits between the DPRK, South Korea, the PRC and the USA respectively, as a positive step to a return to negotiations and continue to believe that it is only through negotiations that a sustainable solution can be found that would bring peace and security to the region.

Chairperson,

South Africa’s approach to nuclear energy is premised on the fact that peaceful nuclear co-operation and access to the benefits of nuclear energy, pursuant to Article IV of the NPT, are integral components of the Treaty. In this context, South Africa is working towards an energy sector that promotes economic growth and sustainable development; hence nuclear energy has been identified as part of our energy mix to
address energy security in the country. We remain committed to maximising the benefits that nuclear energy hold for the socio-economic well-being of our citizens, while ensuring that these technologies are not diverted or abused for non-peaceful activities.

Chairperson,

In conclusion, South Africa reiterates its support for the full implementation of the NPT and its universality in pursuit of our common goal of achieving a world entirely free from nuclear weapons. The strength, credibility and vitality of the NPT rests on the fundamental bargain across its three pillars of nuclear disarmament, nuclear non-proliferation and the peaceful use of nuclear energy, which must be recognized and upheld.

I thank you.