Chairperson,

South Africa wishes to associate itself with the statements delivered on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and the New Agenda Coalition.

Chairperson,

Whilst significant progress has been made in meeting the nuclear non-proliferation obligations of the Treaty, the nuclear disarmament pillar - as enshrined in Article VI and reaffirmed by the subsequent unequivocal undertaking made by the nuclear-weapon States to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals - has yet to be realised.

While it may take time for nuclear disarmament to culminate in a world free of nuclear weapons, we do have a body of consensus measures on which progress could and should have been registered since 2010. Progress has been lacking in a range of areas, including reducing and eliminating nuclear weapons stationed outside the territories of NWS. Similarly, NWS and their allies continue to rely on nuclear weapons as integral to their military and security doctrines. Furthermore, an estimated 1,800 nuclear warheads still remain on high-alert status.

South Africa welcomes the reductions in the global stockpile of nuclear weapons. Reductions are indeed vital to removing the excessive destructive capabilities developed during the Cold War, but do not substitute for concrete, transparent, irreversible and verifiable nuclear disarmament measures.
While reductions are essential, it is important to also note that the current arsenal levels are being compared to Cold War levels. While this may be accurate, it is firstly important to agree that the current levels are still too high. Secondly, the Cold War levels are testament to the fact that effective measures are needed to advance disarmament in a transparent, verifiable and importantly irreversible manner and why this should not be left to States locked in a deterrence situation. Article VI is a matter for all States.

The value of these reductions has regrettably been offset by the development of new categories of nuclear weapons and their delivery systems, which provide a clear indication that some of the nuclear-weapon States continue to harbour aspirations for the indefinite retention of these instruments of destruction, contrary to their legal obligations and commitments. When South Africa agreed to the Treaty’s indefinite extension, we certainly did not agree to the indefinite possession of nuclear weapons.

These modernisation efforts, far from being simply part of ongoing maintenance programmes - as some States have argued - are primarily designed to enhance performance. While there may indeed be fewer nuclear weapons today, the ones that exist are far more destructive and deadly than those they replaced. Such developments, together with the billions allocated for this purpose over several decades, amount to a de facto nuclear arms race, which runs counter to Article VI. In a world where so many live in abject poverty, it is unacceptable that vast resources are diverted for this purpose.

Given this situation, South Africa recommends that this Conference:
Reaffirms the continued validity of the 1995 decision on “Principles and objectives for nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament”, the practical steps agreed to in the Final Document of the 2000 Review Conference and the “Conclusions and Recommendations for follow-on actions” of the 2010 Review Conference, and urges the nuclear-weapon States to accelerate concrete progress on the measures leading to nuclear disarmament through the adoption of specific timelines and benchmarks.

Chairperson,

South Africa is pleased to form part of the humanitarian consequences initiative which we believe serves to buttress the very raison d'être of the Treaty. We are pleased with the fact that more than three-quarters of all countries are now supporting this initiative and that this issue is now well established on the global agenda. Rather than serving as a so-called distraction, these Conferences are integral to advancing Action 1 agreed to in 2010. The humanitarian conferences underscored the fact that the catastrophic consequences of a nuclear weapon detonation, whether by accident, miscalculation or design, is not confined to space and time, and cannot be adequately addressed. In view of security doctrines that continue to include circumstances in which these weapons could be used, my delegation finds little comfort in the "resolve to ensure that this occurrence never happens".

The growing risk cannot be obviated by simply avoiding a nuclear war or the use of nuclear weapons, as some States maintain. It is evident that the only way to guarantee that nuclear weapons will never be used again is through their total elimination.
The realisation of Article VI is not the preserve of the few but the Treaty obliges all States parties to the Treaty to pursue this objective.—It is a shared responsibility of all States to prevent any use of nuclear weapons, to curb their proliferation and to achieve nuclear disarmament.

South Africa has long advocated for the construction of a multilateral, legally-binding agreement to fill this gap and has also long supported a systematic and progressive approach to nuclear disarmament, including through the establishment of a framework agreement, comprising a set of mutually reinforcing instruments. However, for this latter approach to be credible, it has to contain clear timelines and benchmarks that meet the nuclear disarmament principles of transparency, irreversibility and verifiability, many of which have already been agreed but are yet to be implemented.

The construction of such an agreement is in keeping with our obligation to pursue negotiations in good faith on ‘effective measures relating to the cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament’, as envisaged under Article VI. As a starting point, together with the NAC, we call on this Review Conference to explore the legal approaches available to advance these ‘effective measures’. We have heard those States that advocate for a ‘practical’ and ‘realistic’ approach. However, if all States are truly committed to the establishment and maintenance of a nuclear-weapons free world, it is unclear why they would be reluctant to engage in such a discussion.

➢ South Africa therefore expects that this Conference will at least reaffirm the conclusions reached in the 2010 outcome document on this matter, and that it will build on these in a concrete manner taking into account the developments since
the 2010 Recvon, in particular ensuring that the findings of these Conferences are adequately reflected in our follow-on actions and decisions.

- We further recommend that the Review Conference stresses that in light of the growing understanding of the risk posed by nuclear weapons and their devastating humanitarian consequences, there is an urgent need for the full implementation of existing obligations under the NPT and its Review Conferences.

- South Africa calls on the Conference, in its outcome document, to *recognise* all contributions of States Parties regarding effective measures relating to nuclear disarmament in fulfilment of their obligations under Article VI and to *support* a thorough further consideration of these contributions and proposals.

- Most importantly, taking the catastrophic humanitarian considerations as our compass and Article VI as our collective mandate, we expect to see a process firmly and irrevocably put in place to elaborate effective measures leading to nuclear disarmament required by Article VI.

Chairperson,

The NPT cannot succeed if it focuses only on the security interests of the few. Security concerns are important provided that they serve to guarantee security for all the world’s peoples – our collective security. The view that nuclear weapons assist in ‘guaranteeing their security and that of their allies’ amounts to incitement to proliferate because it is simply not sustainable for some States to argue that nuclear weapons are central to their own security, while expecting others not to argue the same.
Similarly, it is unacceptable for some States to maintain that there is a need to create the necessary conditions for nuclear disarmament, when these conditions were in fact created when these very States acceded to the NPT. Such arguments contradict the obligations under Article I of the NPT. As the UN Secretary General has correctly asserted, ‘there are no right hands for wrong weapons’.

Finally, South Africa therefore recommends that the Conference again urges all States Parties to commit to pursue policies and actions that are fully compatible with the Treaty and the objective of achieving a world free of nuclear weapons.

I thank you, Chairperson.