Statement by H.E. Mr. Durga Prasad Bhattarai, Ambassador / Permanent Representative of Nepal to the United Nations at the UN Conference to negotiate a legally-binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons, leading towards their total elimination.

New York, 31 March 2017

[Please Check against delivery]

Madam President,

[ H.E. Elayne Whyte Gómez, PR of Costa Rica to the UN Office in Geneva]

At the outset, allow me to congratulate you on your election to preside over this historic conference. With confidence in your ability to steer the work of the Conference to a fruitful conclusion, I assure you of my delegation’s full cooperation in discharging the vital responsibility entrusted to you. I also wish to extend my congratulations to other members of the bureau for their respective elections.

Madam President,

Nuclear disarmament has been a much-deliberated subject ever since the first resolution of the UN General Assembly in 1946 established a Commission to deal with problems related to the discovery of atomic energy. It was followed by landmark treaties on Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT), Partial Test Ban Treaty (PTBT) and Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), among others. Moreover, the advisory opinion of International Court of Justice (ICJ) in 1996 reaffirmed that a threat or use of nuclear weapons against the principles of the UN Charter is unlawful. However, it is ironical that both horizontal and vertical proliferations continue unabated even after several international conferences. The situation is further exacerbated by modernization programs of the nuclear States, which have accorded unduly important role to nuclear weapons in their security doctrines. The existence of nuclear weapons carries with it the persistent risk of accidental, mistaken, unauthorized or intentional detonations as well. The only way of getting out of all the risks associated with nuclear weapons is their complete elimination.

Notwithstanding how arduous the work is, the world community has not lost its hope of eliminating the only weapon of mass destruction which is not yet prohibited by any
international norms and treaty. The optimism shown by the majority of the Member States while voting in favour of GA resolution 71/258 is a testament to our firm determination towards a world free of nuclear weapons.

Madam President,

We are aware of the indiscriminate and catastrophic humanitarian and environmental consequences of a deliberate or accidental detonation of nuclear arsenals. Earlier this week, during the Conference, we heard the experience of a Hibakusha, Mr. Toshiki Fujimori. We also learned about the consequential deaths and diseases, and lasting environmental devastation and cultural disruption suffered by Marshallese people due to numerous nuclear tests. These and other testimonies from around the world have always reconfirmed that no State or international organization would be able to deal with the devastating chaos and havoc created by nuclear detonations in populated areas.

Contrary to the socio-economic necessity of the humanity, huge amount of resources are spent annually in modernization of nuclear weapons. If diverted to social and humanitarian causes, these resources could help achieve many of the Sustainable Development Goals, including eradicating poverty and hunger, before the deadline and improve the quality of life of all humanity. Therefore, the onus lies on us to devise effective normative and legal frameworks against nuclear weapons for ensuring a peaceful present and a secure future for humanity as well as for the sustainable existence of our planet.

Madam President,

Nepal’s unwavering commitment to world peace and disarmament has been rooted in “the norms of world peace” which are entrenched in the Constitution as a basis of the country’s foreign policy. Nepal strongly believes in the general and complete disarmament of all weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons, in a time-bound manner. With its active advocacy and support for the promotion of disarmament, Nepal is honored to host the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific (UNRCPD) in Kathmandu. Nepal continues to believe in the importance of creating awareness and commitment to disarmament in general and nuclear
disarmament in particular, including through education, training and track-II approaches to disarmament diplomacy.

My country Nepal is located in a neighbourhood which has three Member States with nuclear weapons. The risk of facing severe humanitarian and environmental disasters in the region may not be hypothetical but very real in case of a nuclear detonation-deliberate or accidental. The avalanches in the Himalayas, landslides in the fragile hilly areas and radiation pollution of flora and fauna, soil and the arteries of lives and livelihood in the form of the extensive river systems in Nepal triggered by a nuclear detonation would create havoc, much worse than what we faced during the 2015 earthquake and many other disasters combined.

Madam President,

We do not believe that nuclear weapons can be useful deterrents; instead they are the cause of security dilemma among the nuclear States. In addition, transboundary movements of hazardous wastes and radioactive materials could leave devastating impacts, thus posing a persistent threat to their neighbouring non-nuclear States. Therefore, we emphasize that all States with or without nuclear weapons should work together, engaging in constructive dialogues, and ensuring collective security through the prohibition of nuclear weapons.

Nepal strongly supports a transparent and inclusive multilateral diplomatic process in line with article VI of the NPT for negotiating a legally binding international instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons leading towards their ultimate elimination. We believe that the new legal instrument should completely prohibit the development, testing, production, acquisition, possession, stockpiling, transfer, use and threat of use of nuclear weapons as well as the production of weapons-usable fissile material. The new instrument should also prohibit the member States, their nationals and any other individuals from assisting, financing, encouraging and inducing the acts prohibited by the treaty itself.

While the new instrument should respect the inalienable right of all States to research, produce and use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes without discrimination and in conformity with their relevant international obligations, it should also ensure that the rights of victims and survivors of nuclear activities are protected. It should also promote international cooperation and provide technical assistance to non-nuclear States,
particularly least developed countries, for fulfilling their obligations in implementing the treaty.

Madam President,

A transparent, precise, unambiguous, non-discriminatory and legally sound instrument with ambitious but achievable prohibition goals will be a critical contribution towards disarmament and sustainable world peace. Therefore, the provisions for irreversible, verifiable and transparent destruction of existing nuclear weapons should be firmly incorporated in the new instrument. It should be compatible with the provisions of NPT, CTBT and IAEA and should also reinforce them. It should clearly pronounce that the use of nuclear weapons is against the principles of the UN Charter, and is therefore irreconcilable with international humanitarian and human rights laws. Moreover, the instrument should have the provisions of legally binding verification mechanisms including routine and challenge inspections as well as measures for the use of on-site sensors, satellite photography, radionuclide sampling and other remote sensors. It should also establish an international monitoring system and an agency for ensuring compliance.

The new instrument should recognize the indispensable role of the parliamentarians, academicians, women, youth, civil society and other stakeholders for its successful implementation which will ultimately contribute towards total elimination of the nuclear weapons. The treaty should also have a mechanism for working in partnership with these non-State actors to raise the awareness of the people about the devastating intra-generational and intergenerational consequences.

Madam President,

Before I Conclude, let me reiterate the conviction of Nepal that the possession, use and threat of use of nuclear weapons are an inhumane act, requiring constructive engagement of all States and non-State stakeholders for the elimination of nuclear weapons. Indeed, the conspicuous absence of some Member States of the UN in this Conference has shaken our hope by posing a serious question “are we negotiating a treaty to disarm the unarmed States?” However, we must never lose hope that they will realize their greater responsibility towards humanity and will come back to the negotiation table sooner than later for the sake of a secure and prosperous future for their own peoples as well as for sake of the humanity as a whole.
Since, the new treaty cannot be implemented successfully without the cooperative and consensual participation of the States possessing nuclear weapons, we should redouble our diplomatic efforts to create an environment of mutual trust and confidence. We should also reenergize our collective political will to achieve shared objectives of global peace, security and prosperity by eliminating nuclear weapons and diverting resources used for armament towards achieving Sustainable Development Goals and beyond. Nepal will continue to work closely ahead with you and all delegations seeking to a successful Conference which will be the success of the humanity.

I thank you, Madam President.