STATEMENT

by

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on the

GENERAL DEBATE OF THE
FIRST COMMITTEE AT THE
57TH UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY SESSION

New York, October 3, 2002
Mr. Chairman,

My delegation joins other speakers in congratulating you on your election as Chairman. Our congratulations also go to other members of the Bureau.

Mr. Chairman,

There is no doubt that the Cold War was the harbinger of unbridled arms race that has lingered on to this day. The end of the Cold War has not only presented a good opportunity, but also further brightened our hopes, for an early conclusion of an agreement on general and complete disarmament under effective international control. There should not be any further excuses for failure to disarm under this prevailing auspicious political environment.

Disarmament and Non-proliferation have been central to the efforts aimed at the maintenance of international peace and security since the establishment of the United Nations. Nigeria, like other member states, shared the hopes and ideals of a world devoid of threat of weapons of mass destruction and conventional arms. For this reason, Nigeria placed high priority on efforts to bring about the reduction and eventual elimination of weapons of mass destruction which pose the greatest threat to the survival of humankind.

Mr. Chairman,

It is a matter of regret that our hope for a nuclear-free world is fast becoming forlorn as the world continues to witness an enormous increase and qualitative improvement of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems. This has been further complicated by new threats in form of excessive accumulation of conventional arms, proliferation of small arms and light weapons, massive deployment of landmines in conflict areas and international terrorism. With annual global military budget at a staggering $850 billion in a world where hundreds of millions of people earn less than one dollar a day such expenditures are simply unconscionable. This situation calls for the urgent implementation of the action programme adopted at the International Conference on the Relationship between Disarmament and Development.
Today a few countries have, between them, enough nuclear-weapon capability to destroy the world and annihilate humankind several times over, including themselves. New strategic doctrines are being proposed or embarked upon that will not improve the quality of human life but spark new arms race whose only relevance is the development or acquisition of new generation of weapons to enable man kill one, many or mass of his own kind. We understand the immense feeling of power that possession of nuclear weapons accords to nuclear weapon states over non-nuclear weapon states. We also understand the danger it portends for both. It is important to note that the pervasive presence of nuclear arms, at the minimum, brings the world closer to possible nuclear accident, if not a nuclear conflagration.

Fortunately, there is no lack of effort on the part of the international community towards genuine disarmament. The last decade alone has witnessed the indefinite extension of the NPT, the successful negotiation Chemical Weapons Convention and the conclusion of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), as well as the entry into force of the Ottawa Convention on Anti-Personnel Landmines.

Inspite of these efforts, and even as we are confronted with the danger of weapons of mass destruction and other types of weapons, divergent views continue to exist among delegations as to the way forward thus stalling further progress on various issues under the disarmament agenda. The CTBT has not yet entered into force due to the failure of some member states to ratify it, in particular those states whose ratification is mandatory for its entry into force; negotiations to conclude a compliance mechanism for biological weapons convention were inconclusive; the Chemical Weapons Convention still lacks universality; the Conference on Disarmament, the only single multilateral negotiating forum on disarmament, has gone comatose; the Disarmament Commission failed to meet this year, the 50th anniversary of its existence; the negotiation of a fissile material cut-off treaty still remains outstanding.

Global peace can only be achieved through multilaterally agreed, legally-binding agreements that provide for a full monitoring and implementation machinery. It must be recognized that any presumption of indefinite possession of nuclear weapons by some countries cannot be compatible with sustaining the non-proliferation regime and the goal of preservation of international peace and security. Nigeria believes that unless the major
powers show sufficient flexibility and practical commitment to nuclear disarmament, the overall disarmament process will continue to be paralysed.

Mr. Chairman,

Coming from a continent that has suffered a great deal from the menace of landmines, Nigeria is totally committed to their elimination. In many post-conflict African countries, civilians, particularly women and children, cannot move around freely for fear of being maimed or killed by landmines. Available arable land cannot be cultivated due to presence of mines, even in the face of hunger and famine. The escalating proliferation and indiscriminate use of anti-personnel landmines around the globe demands urgent attention.

We are delighted to note the tremendous success which the world community has achieved in the fight against landmines since the entry into force of the Ottawa Convention in 1999. We are equally pleased with the outcome of the recent Fourth Meeting of States Parties which took place in Geneva last month, and in particular the adoption of a number of measures and recommendations aimed at full implementation of the Convention and at ensuring its universality. We call for further international assistance to support mine action programmes in mine-affected countries. We note, with interest, the positive role that NGOs have continued to play in this area. We call on member states that have not done so to accede to the Convention as early as possible.

Mr. Chairman,

Small arms and light weapons are a major cause of political instability in developing countries, especially Africa. We support the Programme of Action that emerged from the Small Arms Conference in July last year. We note, however, that the Conference failed to agree on the need to establish and maintain control over private ownership of small arms and the need to prevent supply of SALW to non-state actors.

As part of our efforts in the fight against illicit proliferation of SALW, Nigeria, together with South Africa, Mali, Kenya, Norway, Austria, Canada, Switzerland, The Netherlands and the United Kingdom co-sponsored the African Conference on the Implementation of the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms: Needs and Partnerships which took place in Pretoria from
18 to 21 March this year. For Nigeria and other participants, the Conference brought to the fore the impelling need to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit proliferation of small arms and light weapons. I, therefore, reiterate the call by President Olusegun Obasanjo for a legally binding international instrument to identify and trace illicit small arms and light weapons.

Mr. Chairman,

My delegation reaffirms its strong support for the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones on the basis of agreements freely arrived at among the states concerned. We remain committed to the African Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone Treaty (Treaty of Pelindaba). Similarly, we support efforts made by member states presently covered by the Treaties of Tlatelolco, Rarotonga and Bangkok and call on countries outside these Treaty bodies to join in the noble efforts towards the strengthening of international peace and security. We welcome the recent announcement that the central Asian states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have agreed to establish a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia. In the same vein, we welcome the recent decision by Cuba to accede to NPT and to ratify the Treaty of Tlatelolco.

Mr. Chairman,

There is need to preserve the outer space as the common heritage of mankind and for peaceful purposes only. Despite the achievements of the existing arms control agreements in regulating the activities of states in the outer space, they were insufficient in arresting the deployment of other weapons of mass destruction in the outer space. There is a need, therefore, for a legally binding international instrument to prohibit deployment of weapons in outer space and the prevention of threat or use of force against outer space objects. In this regard, my delegation supports the joint proposal at the Conference on Disarmament for negotiation of such a legally binding instrument.

Mr. Chairman,

My delegation will again this year sponsor, as it had done in the past, a resolution on the United Nations Disarmament Fellowship Programme. The programme, which was initiated in 1979 has benefited many participants from member states. We appreciate the efforts of member states, which have
provided and continue to provide resources and facilities for participants. We are equally grateful to the Secretary-General for the able manner the Organization has implemented the programme over the years. We call on member states to support the draft resolution on the programme when presented.

I thank you.