Mr. Chairman,

Allow me, first of all, to congratulate you and the other members of the Bureau on your well deserved election to preside over the work of the First Committee during this session of the General Assembly and also to thank your predecessor and the other members of last year’s Bureau for the excellent work which they performed. We are confident that you, Ambassador Kiwanuka, because of your vast experience in the United Nations, will preside over our meetings with wisdom and balance.

Allow me also to express my gratitude to Under-Secretary General for Disarmament Affairs, Jayantha Dhanapala, for his important statement at the beginning of this General Debate, as well as for his and the DDA staff’s dedication and continuous support to this Committee and the cause of disarmament and international security.

Mr. Chairman,

Colombia associates itself with the statement made by the Permanent Representative of Costa Rica on behalf of the country’s members of the Rio Group. However, with this intervention, my delegation wishes to clarify and expand on its national position on the various items of the agenda of this Committee which are of particular interest to Colombia.
During last year’s General Debate, when we still felt in its entire dimension the acts of international terrorism that took place in this city and in other parts of the United States, Colombia proposed to this First Committee to make an important contribution towards the eradication of this problem which has become the most serious threat to peace and security. We cited among other items of our agenda, the Convention on Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons, the Convention on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Deemed to Have Indiscriminate Effects, or the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

We must once again appeal for universal accession to these Conventions and insist on the explicit prohibition of the use of these weapons of mass destruction, on restricting the development of new technologies for these weapons and, naturally, on ensuring that the chemical and bacteriological weapons that already exist do not fall into the hands of terrorists. We again insist that the best guarantee for this is the total elimination of such weapons. The countries that possess chemical weapons should proceed to destroy them in fullfilment of the Convention and submit detailed plans on this process of destruction. We must also work towards the inclusion of new arms within the scope of implementation of the Convention on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons and towards the adoption of new protocols in this field. With regard to the Convention on Bacteriological Weapons, we continue to await agreement on a Verification Protocol.

Mr. Chairman,

If progress with respect to these weapons of mass destruction remains unsatisfactory, neither have the advances made with regard to the foremost weapons of mass destruction – nuclear weapons – been satisfactory. Not all members of the international community have thus far acceded to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), which are the cornerstones for progress in the field of nuclear disarmament. Now more than ever, it is of crucial importance for the international community, acting together, to assume its responsibilities with respect to these treaties.

Colombia deplores the few results of this year’s PrepCom of the 2005 NPT Review Conference and strengthens the urgency of the full implementation of the Thirteen Measures for Nuclear Disarmament included in the final document of the 2000 NPT Review Conference.

On this aspect of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems, Colombia reiterates its belief that their total elimination is the best guarantee of international peace and security. We reject deterrence and strategic alliances doctrines, as well as the doctrine that proposes new uses for nuclear weapons, since they are based on force or the threat of use of force. We continue to believe that general and complete disarmament under effective international control is not a utopia but a necessity that is becoming increasingly imperative, given the new challenges we face to international peace and security.
Therefore we are particularly concerned that the Conference on Disarmament, the main forum for negotiations, has not been able to reach agreement on its programme of work. It is an alarming sign that after four years of paralysis the Conference has not been able to work on issues that we all recognize as being substantive and of priority importance for international security.

In this difficult context, Colombia welcomes three positive developments of the last year: first, the “Moscow Treaty” and the Joint Declaration on a New Strategic Relationship between the United States and the Russian Federation; second, the decision of Cuba to adhere to the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and to ratify the “Tlatelolco Treaty” which complements the world’s first inhabited nuclear free zone; and third, the agreement on the establishment of a nuclear Free Zone in Central Asia.

Mr. Chairman,

There are two items on the agenda of this First Committee which for Colombia, because of the internal conflict it is experiencing, are of fundamental importance. These are the implementation of the Convention on the Prohibition of Anti-Personnel Mines and the Convention on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons. In both of these areas we note with satisfaction that substantive progress has been achieved, even though much more still remains to be done.

The results of the Fourth Conference of States Parties to the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction continue to point a marked reduction in the exports of these devices and in the number of countries producing them, a significant increase in the number of mines destroyed and a significant reduction in the number of victims. However, there is still an urgent need to finally achieve universality for the Convention and the participation of those who are today the largest producers of this type of mines.

With regard to the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, the statistics issued by the “Small Arms Survey” of 2002 are impressive regarding the dimension of the problem and its negative effects on international peace and security. There are already 639 million of these arms in the world and 60% are illicit. During the 90s these arms have killed almost 4 million civilians, most of them women and children, and have forcefully displaced tens of millions of people, also most of them women and children. With these very good reasons the Secretary General of the UN has affirmed that in the reality of today’s world, the small arms and light weapons are truly mass destruction weapons.

Tomorrow the Security Council will hold an open meeting about the role of the Council in preventing, combating and eradicating the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. We will debate on the base of the report of the Secretary General on Small Arms, submitted pursuant a Security Council’s Presidential Statement approved on August 31, 2001, when Colombia was the President of the Council. We invite all Member States to participate in this debate on the issue in situations under the consideration of the Council.
In the context of the General Assembly, Colombia had the honour to preside over the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, and since last year, with Japan and South Africa, is the primary sponsor of the draft resolution on this issue. We are also actively participating in the Group of Governmental Experts established to undertake a study on the possibility of developing an international instrument to identify and trace small arms and light weapons.

This years' draft resolution decides to convene for July 2003 the first of the biennial meetings stipulated in the Programme of Action, considers further steps to enhance international cooperation against illicit brokering of these arms, and encourages the mobilisation of resources and expertise to promote the implementation of the Programme of Action. Colombia considers this last issue a fundamental one because the developed world has not yet fulfilled its commitments under Section III of the Programme on international cooperation and assistance.

We invite all Member States to cosponsor this draft resolution and to work towards the full implementation of the measures contained in the Programme of Action at the national, regional and global levels; the promotion of the international co-operation and assistance that States require to implement the measures, and towards ensuring adequate follow-up to the Conference.

Mr. Chairman,

Allow me to conclude by expressing the commitment of Colombia with the agenda on disarmament, non-proliferation and international security that considers this Committee, and by reiterating our conviction that only a multilateral an shared responsibility approach on this topics will allow us to maintain international peace and security and to contribute to global efforts against terrorism.

Thank you.