FIRST COMMITTEE
FIFTY-SEVENTH SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

GENERAL DEBATE
ON DISARMAMENT AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

Statement by
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To the United Nations

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*Please check against delivery*
Mr. Chairman,

To begin with, let me extend to you and all members of the Bureau the Lao PDR delegation's sincere congratulations on your elections to steer this important Committee. We trust that your rich experience and competence in multi-lateral diplomacy will help guide the work of our committee to a success. You can rest assured of our full support and cooperation in carrying out your current mandate.

We would also like to convey our appreciation to the former Chairman, Ambassador Andre Erdos and his staff for the excellent work they fulfilled during the previous session.

Mr. Chairman,

Associating ourselves with the statement made earlier by the Permanent Representative of the Union of Myanmar, on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), we would like to commend the great and relentless efforts that all peace-loving people over the world have pursued over the past year towards progress in the field of international disarmament. The remitting drive by the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) to give the process of global disarmament the go-ahead is also applaudable. The Ministerial Meeting of the NAM Coordinating Bureau held in April of this year adopted a final document which set out its position and future direction on, among other things, the enhancement of international disarmament and security. In addition, we welcome the signing of the US-Russia Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty or “Moscow Treaty”, a move which Secretary-General Kofi Annan called “a positive step in the direction of nuclear disarmament...” No less remarkable is the progress achieved by ASEAN in the field of political and security cooperation among its members as well as within the framework of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF).

Mr. Chairman,

In spite of these foregoing progresses, the prospects of achieving complete disarmament remain bleak and full of hurdles. The unjustified stockpiling and development of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction are going on with no sign of ebb. The military expenditures of member states have also been on the steady increase. The fact that some major power has updated its strategic defense doctrine spelling out new rationales for the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons against Non-Nuclear Weapon States is of particular concern. This move is obviously contradictory to the negative security assurances that have been provided by the Nuclear Weapon States.

Furthermore, our planet continues to be raged by lingering armed conflicts, acts of aggression and violence, terror, interferences in the internal affairs of states, ethnic strife, and civil wars. These instances of instability have not only retarded the development efforts of the majority of nations, in particular developing countries, but could also induce conditions for the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction.
In the face of such dangerous situation, it is vital for the international community to step up its efforts and do everything possible to address the root-causes of conflict and put off the existing hot spots around the world. Primarily, efforts must be pursued step by step towards eliminating all nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. To this end, due and urgent consideration must be given to the conclusion of a universal unconditional and legally binding instrument on security assurances to Non-Nuclear Weapon States. It is also our delegation's hope that the ASEAN-sponsored draft resolution initiated by the Union of Myanmar on nuclear disarmament would receive due support from member states, especially Nuclear Weapons States.

Mr. Chairman,

The Lao PDR is of the view that the total elimination of nuclear weapons is the only absolute guarantee against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons. We, therefore, welcome all efforts at the international, regional and national levels aimed at reducing and eliminating nuclear weapons. In this context, we support the NAM's call for an earliest international conference on the complete elimination of nuclear weapons which represents the follow-up to the UN Millennium Declaration regarding nuclear disarmament.

Like other Member States, we are deeply concerned about a potential arms race in outer space. This is due to the termination of the Treaty on the Limitation of Anti-ballistic Missiles (ABM). Moreover, the launching of a national missile defense system could further the development of advanced missile systems and increase the number of nuclear warheads. It is therefore extremely imperative for the Conference on Disarmament to commence substantive work on the prevention of arms race in outer space. In this context, we appreciate the efforts pursued by some major Nuclear Weapons States towards the conclusion of a new outer-space arms-control agreement. We believe that, with strong political will and commitment of all concerned parties, the outstanding disagreement on this issue would be overcome and an effective outer-space regime would ultimately be established.

Mr. Chairman,

In our view, the NPT should still serve as a cornerstone for the total and complete elimination of nuclear weapons. It is essential that all State Parties, especially Nuclear Weapons States, to this important Treaty fulfill their obligations provided therein. Our delegation shares the view that priority attention must be paid to the advancement of the UN Conference on Disarmament (CD) so that it can start its work towards the negotiation on a Convention on Nuclear Disarmament as soon as possible. In this regard, we join other member states in welcoming the decision of the Government of Cuba to accede to the NPT and ratify the Tlatelolco Treaty. This reflects Cuba's strong commitment to nuclear disarmament.

Recognizing the importance of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) which contributes to the process of nuclear disarmament, the Lao PDR has
deposited an instrument of ratification of the Treaty with the UN since October, 2000. This attests to our government’s strong commitment to nuclear disarmament and reflects our aspiration to live in peace and build a world free from nuclear threats. However, in order to make this Treaty effective, we deem it necessary for other Member States who have not done so to follow suit and call for the full realization of its objectives by all States Signatories, particularly the Nuclear Weapons States.

Equally essential for the maintenance of international and regional peace and security is the universal adherence to the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC), especially the strengthening of it through multi-lateral negotiations for a legally binding Protocol to the Convention. Our delegation is also of the view that the threat of biological weapons as instruments of war and terror has stressed the necessity and urgency to ensure the effectiveness of this Convention. In this regard, special emphasis must be put on the need for all State Parties to pursue the objectives set forth by the Fourth Review Conference and to contribute towards the successful conclusion of the next Review conference to be reconvened in the near future.

Mr. Chairman,

We believe that the creation of nuclear-weapon-free zones (NWFZs) is a positive step towards the goal of global nuclear disarmament. As a State Party to the Bangkok Treaty establishing the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapons Free Zone (SEANWFZ), the Lao PDR has done its best to contribute to the ASEAN efforts in this respect. Yet, for the Treaty to be effective, a Protocol annexed to it must be acceded by Nuclear Weapons States. We therefore join other ASEAN member states in welcoming the announcement by the PR of China on its readiness to accede to the Protocol. We also renew our call for other Nuclear Weapons States to accede to the Protocol at an earliest date.

Mr. Chairman,

In view of the above situation, evidently, one of the most urgent tasks at the United Nations is to seriously work together towards a complete end to nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. To accomplish this task, we believe that no effort must be spared to get the disarmament process back on track. Furthermore, the root-causes of instability and conflicts, above all poverty, ought to be dealt with in a more responsible manner. Only by doing so, we will be able to gradually build a world filled with peace and free from the threats of weapons of mass destruction!

I thank you, Mr. Chairman.