STATEMENT

BY

MR. GERHARD THERON
MINISTER-COUNSELLOR

AT

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

NEW YORK, 9 OCTOBER 2002
Mr. Chairman,

From the outset, allow me to congratulate you on your election as Chairman of the First Committee. Your experience and professionalism will undoubtedly be a valuable asset to the work of the Committee. Our congratulations also go to the other members of the Bureau. You can be assured of my delegation’s full cooperation during this Session.

The recent developments internationally have placed renewed focus on the urgent need to seriously address non-proliferation, disarmament and arms control issues globally. The importance of a multilateral approach to achieve these goals has also been reinforced. The Heads of State and Government in the historic Millennium Declaration expressed their solemn resolve to, inter alia, free people from the scourge of war and eliminate the dangers posed by weapons of mass destruction. However, for a number of reasons, not much progress has been achieved in the disarmament field, despite the gravity of the situation.

Mr. Chairman,

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) remains the cornerstone for the total elimination and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. We welcome the outcome of the First Meeting of the Preparatory Committee for the NPT Review Conference in 2005, which was held in April this year. We hope that further progress will be made at the next PrepCom. However, above all, it is important for all Member States to ensure compliance with agreed decisions, in order to completely rid the world of nuclear weapons. It is therefore disappointing to note that the nuclear weapon States are not adhering to the 13 Steps towards nuclear disarmament as adopted at the 2000 NPT Review Conference. My delegation however, welcomes the important decision by Cuba to become a State Party to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and to ratify the Tlatelolco Treaty.

Mr. Chairman,

My delegation welcomes the continued response of countries to sign and ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT). However, the slow progress towards the early entry into force of the Convention remains a concern, despite the holding of the Conferences on Facilitating the Entry into Force of the Treaty and other measures. The refusal by key States to ratify the Treaty has the potential to erode the confidence in this important Instrument of nuclear non-proliferation. We therefore call on the remaining 13 countries required to ensure the entry into force of the Treaty to ratify it as soon as possible.

Mr. Chairman,

The devastating humanitarian impact of landmines was yet again emphasized at the recent Fourth Meeting of States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and the Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction (MKT). My region has, and still experiences the horror and devastation caused by these dreadful weapons. Countless numbers of people are killed and maimed, and in the face of hunger and famine, arable land cannot even be cultivated due to the presence of mines.

We therefore welcome the progress that the world community has made in dealing with anti-personnel mines since the entry into force of the Ottawa Convention in 1999. We are equally pleased with the outcome of the Fourth Meeting of States Parties, where a number of measures
and recommendations aimed at the full implementation of the Convention and at ensuring its universality were adopted. Only with a firm commitment by the international community will we be able to save mankind from this scourge. My delegation is also happy to note that all Member States in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Sub-region have ratified the Mine Ban Treaty.

Mr. Chairman,

The Small Arms Conference in July 2001 and the adoption of the Programme of Action was indeed one of the highlights in disarmament last year. While the outcome was not completely satisfactory, significant progress was made on the matter. My delegation is happy with the commitment by States to implement the Programme of Action, as witnessed through their national reports on national implementation activities, and compliance with Security Council arms embargoes.

The danger posed by conventional weapons has become even more problematic with the development of new and highly sophisticated technologies in the conventional weapons industry. Despite the urgent need to fight poverty and diseases such as HIV/AIDS, a lot of money continues to be spent on the production of these weapons which create havoc and untold suffering, especially in Africa. My delegation therefore continues to support international efforts to promote transparency and confidence-building measures among States.

In this regard, my Government hosted the United Nations Workshop on Transparency in Armaments in Windhoek in June 2002. The Workshop was sponsored by Canada, Germany, Japan and the Netherlands and was attended by government officials from countries in the region. The Workshop succeeded in creating greater awareness and participation in arms transparency instruments.

This week, the National Conference on Small Arms and Light Weapons, which compliments the Southern African Development Community (SADC), Protocol on Firearms and Ammunition is taking place in Windhoek. The main objectives of the Conference are to raise public awareness and to encourage a national debate over the need for the strengthening of firearms laws and regulations, and their enforcement capacity in Namibia, in compliance with regional and international agreements and commitments.

Mr. Chairman,

My delegation appreciates the activities of the United Nations Regional Centres for Peace and Disarmament. They have been of tremendous assistance to the regions where they are located, and help us focus and conduct in-depth analyses of disarmament issues in relation to broader and urgent global problems, which are on the agenda of the United Nations. These Centres should therefore receive all the necessary support.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, my delegation wishes to reiterate its concurrence with the Secretary-General’s appeal to rededicate ourselves to multilateral approaches to disarmament. This will also be the best way for us to address the threats posed by international terrorism and weapons of mass destruction.

I thank you.