Statement by
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Permanent Representative
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Mr. Chairman,

Let me begin by congratulating you, on behalf of the Croatian delegation, on your election as the Chairman of the First Committee, as well as to other members of the Bureau. I assure you of the full support of my delegation.

Croatia has aligned itself with the statement delivered earlier by the Netherlands on behalf of the European Union. We fully subscribe to the analysis of key threats and challenges contained therein, and support proposals for concrete actions to counter them.

Mr. Chairman,

Croatia is fully aware of the appeals for shorter statements, in line with the efforts to increase efficiency of the First Committee and in the broader framework of the revitalization of the General Assembly. We have adopted the policy of distributing integral statements in writing, while orally presenting only prominent points, most notably during this year’s general debate in the General Assembly.

However, we are also receptive to arguments that the First Committee remains the only multilateral forum where all countries, including smaller ones, can once a year present their priorities in the field of disarmament. Admittedly, it is a field resplendent with lofty promises, but still lacking adequate implementation. In this respect, I will give a short overview of the most important issues that are of particular interest for my delegation, or whose significance merits regular repetition until such time they become universally accepted.

Croatia is convinced that only effective multilateralism based on the rule of law can provide an adequate answer to the complex global challenges and threats facing the world today. Weapons of mass destruction falling into the hands of terrorists with the intention of using them would constitute unprecedented and potentially destructive prospects for humanity as a whole. Therefore, it is incumbent upon us to continually galvanize support for multilateral legally binding agreements and enhance their verification mechanisms.

In the past years, Croatia has taken numerous steps in the fight against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, their components, and their means of delivery. Croatia has tightened its national export legislation and continued institution building at interagency levels, while at the same time increasing its participation in international and regional non-proliferation efforts.

Croatia supports the Hague Code of Conduct, and aligns with the EU in exploring possibilities of establishing relationship between the Code and the UN. Furthermore, we recognize the ground-breaking tasks of the Security Council Committee established by the Resolution 1540 with the goal of curbing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction to non-state actors.

Croatia has given support to the Proliferation Security Initiative and its Counter Proliferation Principles, and has expressed readiness to actively contribute to the cause of the Initiative in accordance with the existing institutional capabilities and national legislation. In addition, Croatia applied for membership in the Wassenaar Arrangement and the Missile Technology Control
Regime, and expressed interest in joining the Nuclear Suppliers Group, the Australian Group and the Zangger Committee.

In the same vein, Croatia would like to see concrete results from the upcoming NPT Review Conference, in spite of ineffective preparatory process and absence of the agreed agenda. Fixing loopholes in present multilateral regimes has to be complemented with our continued common efforts to ensure their global application.

Croatia has consistently supported bringing into force the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. We are pleased that the number of necessary ratifications has decreased to 11, and urge those that have not yet done so to heed the call of the recent Ministerial meeting on CTBT, held in New York, and sign and ratify the Treaty as soon as possible. While national moratoria are welcome in refraining from nuclear tests, only a universal mechanism can provide genuine protection from potential nuclear test-caused devastation.

Croatia is still a mine-affected state, although mine contamination is a gradually decreasing problem in my country. We believe that through the joint efforts of the Government authorities, numerous hard-working personnel involved in mine action on the ground, and with generous international assistance, Croatia should be free of mines by 2009.

I would like to reiterate Croatia's readiness to host, in 2005, the Meeting of the States Parties of the Ottawa Convention directly following the Nairobi Conference on Mine Free World. This will be a unique opportunity to organize, for the first time, a meeting of States Parties in Southeast Europe, a region still heavily contaminated with anti-personnel mines, which has never had an opportunity to host a mine-related meeting of such a high profile.

Croatia welcomes the adoption of the Protocol on Explosive Remnants of War and expects to complete its ratification procedure by the end of this year. Moreover, even though Croatia firmly believes that the prime responsibility for clearing explosive remnants of war lies with the country that deployed these weapons, we accept the solution contained in the Protocol whereby the country that deployed the explosive ordnance would cooperate closely with the country in control of a contaminated territory in clearance operations.

As regards the small arms and light weapons, I would like to inform that Croatia is in the last stages of internal procedure to ratify the Firearms Protocol, which should also be finalized by the end of this year.

Finally, I would like to conclude by adding my voice to those who consistently recognize the growingly beneficial role that civil society plays in the field of disarmament. On the one hand, non-governmental organizations put pressure on each individual government to take necessary steps towards disarmament. On the other hand, their committed and insightful coverage of our deliberations in the international fora, including the First Committee, may give additional impetus to initiatives to break the deadlock and finally move the multilateral disarmament agenda forward.

Thank you.