66th session of the United Nations General Assembly
First Committee

"General debate"

Statement by

H.E. Ambassador Eric Danon,
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to the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva

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Mr. President,
Dear Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

1/ a. Last year, at the same period of time, we were pleased to note here recent major successes: the conclusion of the New START treaty, the NPT Review Conference, the Summit on Nuclear Security, the first Arms Trade Treaty Preparatory Committee, the entry into force of the Oslo Convention. All bodies involved in disarmament and non-proliferation made important strides, with the notable exception of the Conference on Disarmament.

Compared with that fruitful period, the past 12 months were a transition period marked by efforts to implement the commitments undertaken, particularly the follow-up to the NPT Review Conference, with strong involvement on the part of nuclear states, and the entry into force of the New START agreement.

But this period was also marked by strong questions about the future—particularly the future of the CD—and by a raft of initiatives. These reflect the international community's positive move toward regaining collective momentum despite a number of tensions. They must not, however, lead to a dispersion of efforts while the Review Conference established a collective road map for us based on the three pillars of the treaty.

b. This year, with no preparatory committee for the 2015 NPT Review Conference, debates on the nuclear issue tended to draw away from the action plan adopted in May 2010.

We saw the reemergence—no less than two days ago, right here at the opening of our session—of calls for an international convention to ban nuclear weapons that were not retained at the Review Conference or in debates at any other UN body. In addition, to launch the negotiation of the Cut Off Treaty, some are proposing mechanisms outside the Conference on Disarmament, while the NPT action plan, in line with all resolutions adopted in the First Committee, call for starting those talks in the Geneva framework.

2. France wants to see a return to greater consistency. For its part, it unambiguously reaffirms its full respect for the commitments it undertook in the 2010 final document. It will be prepared to present its report to that end in 2014, as scheduled. Furthermore, given its dedication to working with other nuclear powers that, like itself, share a special responsibility, it hosted in Paris, on June 30 and July 1, the first P5 follow-up meeting to the NPT Review Conference. Its success underscored the commitment of the Five and helped establish a positive dynamic among them. Since then, there have been more and more meetings of the Five, and soon we should reap the fruit of this intense activity. I observe, for example, that this week, meetings between the Five and the ASEAN countries should enable us to make considerable progress toward drafting a protocol to the Bangkok Treaty, establishing a nuclear weapons-free zone in Southeast Asia.

Beyond that, the implementation of the 2010 action plan is the shared responsibility of all states-parties, and it is with the involvement of all that we will collectively move toward the complete and balanced implementation of our commitments on the three pillars.
Mr. President,

3. Our Committee's work must enable us to refocus concretely on what is essential.

- First, we must redouble our efforts to counter the biggest danger facing our planet today, i.e., nuclear proliferation. I am thinking in particular of the ongoing crises in Iran and North Korea, and of the Syrian nuclear issue that has been transferred to the UN Security Council.

Because we must be clear: Nuclear proliferation is an obstacle to both disarmament and to the development of civilian nuclear energy. More disarmament will not suffice to stop proliferation. The ongoing development of nuclear and ballistic programs in Iran and North Korea in recent years are proof of that.

On the national level, France is acting in all forums—including the G8, which we are presiding over this year—to strengthen the non-proliferation regime. For us it is an absolute priority, notably with the strengthening of IAEA guarantees, the widespread acceptance of the Additional Protocol, the entry in force of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, and of course the opening of negotiations on a Cut Off Treaty.

Which brings me to the second priority: breaking the deadlock of the Conference on Disarmament and launching the FMCT negotiation.

The deadlock of the CD, as well as giving rise to legitimate frustrations, also leads to dangerous delays in the necessary progress of disarmament and contributes to undermining the international community's trust in multilateralism.

The HLM debates confirmed - if proof were necessary - that the deadlock of the Conference on Disarmament stemmed from political antagonisms and not procedural constraints. We must take note of this but we must reaffirm to those who think they can take advantage of the current deadlock that they're running counter to history.

Some people would like to try and get around the Conference on Disarmament. We believe this is an exercise in futility. Exporting the problems to another forum won't help to resolve them. On the contrary, we must tirelessly continue to work toward establishing a program of work for the Conference on Disarmament which respects the priorities established by the international community - and firstly the establishment of the elements of a Cut Off Treaty – at the same time as allowing the members States, without exception, to have their security interests protected by the forum's rules of procedure.

- Thirdly, we must make sure that the nuclear issue doesn't overshadow the other multilateral negotiations on disarmament.

Mobilization remains necessary in all areas: biological, chemical, conventional weapons, ballistic missile proliferation, and space. It's not just a matter of improving international security but also of preventing nuclear disarmament from being offset by a new arms race in these areas.

- With respect to the Chemical Weapons Convention, I would like - at a crucial moment in its implementation - to reaffirm France's attachment both to the universalization and the full implementation of the Convention.

- Regarding the Biological Weapons Convention, the main challenge for the 2011 Conference will be to further improve, in the context that we're now experiencing, the proper application of
this instrument. It will also require improving the fight against biological threats of all kinds, notably those linked to the hijacking of scientific and technical progress for terrorist or criminal purposes. Lastly, it will also require perfecting our cooperation mechanisms to prevent and detect public health risks at the global level.

- With respect to cluster munitions, France welcomes the success of the second Conference of the States Parties to the Oslo Convention which was perfectly organized by the Lebanese government. We also welcome the increasing number of accessions to the convention, some of which were announced in Beirut. Regarding the next session of the CCW next month in Geneva, France would like to see substantial progress on the text presented by the President of the GGE. This notably requires us to improve certain provisions relating to the immediate humanitarian impact that a future Protocol VI of the CCW, compatible with and complementary to the Oslo Convention, should have.

- Lastly, we welcome the progress made in the preparatory work on the adoption of an Arms Trade Treaty. We believe that the mechanism implemented by the resolution adopted in the First Commission two years ago works in an exemplary manner. We’re working actively to ensure that the July 2012 Conference is decisive with respect to the adoption of such a treaty. In the meantime, we will support, in the coming days, any decision or resolution that will allow us to further improve preparations, in February, for the work of the future Conference.

- Finally, allow me to draw your attention to ballistic proliferation, which several UNSC resolutions consider to be—along with WMDs—a threat to international peace and security. At this stage, the international community does not have a mandate on this issue, but we all know that that the Iranian and North Korean programs in particular are moving forward. It is a collective concern that is becoming urgent to deal with.

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to conclude by reminding you that one of the most important issues we will have to face in the coming months concerns the implementation of the 1995 resolution on the Middle East. There too, the NPT Review Conference allowed for significant progress. But even more, what happened in numerous countries of the region and on the southern shore of the Mediterranean is changing for the better the parameters of a particularly complex political equation. It is in the interest of all the countries of the region to take advantage of this historic opportunity.

We hope that significant progress will be made in the coming weeks, notably with the selection of a facilitator and a host country, and especially the holding in 2012 of the Conference planned in the final document of 2010 which should bring together all concerned players in the best possible conditions. Expectations in this regard are high and legitimate. A failure, when conditions seem favorable, would be fraught with consequences. We are therefore particularly encouraged that the European Union was able to host an academic seminar last July on confidence-building measures, attended by all the countries of the region.

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Mr. President, dear colleagues,

These are some of the thoughts I wanted to share with you, as well as the actions France is taking or plans to take to contribute to progress on the path of disarmament, toward the safer world we all wish for.