Chairman’s Introductory Remarks at Commencement of the 69th Session of the First Committee

At the outset, permit me to make a brief statement in my capacity as Chair and to thank the General Assembly for electing me to the Chair of the First Committee.

I reiterate the pledge I made during the several rounds of informal consultations in which I engaged prior to the commencement of this Session, which is to remain accessible to all delegations and to conduct the business of the Committee in an open and transparent fashion.

I have not the slightest doubt that we all, each delegation herein assembled, will approach the agenda of the Committee with a sincere desire to create conditions within which global peace can reign and our collective security can be assured.

That we each bring our unique perspectives, national interests and different approaches to bear on deliberations on what is a unitary agenda is understandable and reflects the nature of multilateralism. For the issues with which we grapple are complex and pierce the heart of the fundamental concerns we harbor about our core security interests.

It is my wish, however, that even as we assert the primacy of our respective interests, we will continue our fine tradition of engaging with each other in an atmosphere of respect, mindful of the need to conduct our debate in a manner that affords each delegation an equal amount of time to effectively ventilate their positions.

We stand at an important juncture in history, which I believe will be remembered as much for the dramatic technological advances that are emblematic of this information and communications age, as it will be for the fact that we are facing what is the most diverse range of international security threats we have witnessed since the end of WWII. Even as we derive great benefits in our personal and commercial relations from the wide array of technological advances, we are simultaneously confronted by significant threats from emerging weapons technologies that pose risks to international peace and security.

If the voices that were raised at our recent general debate are a manifestation of global sentiment, then there is widespread concern among our political leaders about the number and broad spectrum of the threats we currently face, which represent significant risk to millions of people around the world.

We must come to grips with the dangerous intersection between the activities of trans-national criminal organisations, terrorist groups, state and non-state informal actors and violent extremists. The instability they foment is fueled by their access to the instruments of war, which consist primarily of the small arms and light weapons that are the tools of choice in most of the world’s conflicts and where innocent civilians, particularly women and children, suffer greatest harm.

I am therefore pleased to note that the Fifth Biennial Meeting of States on the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons acknowledged the importance of promoting the
participation of women in the PoA. Moreover, the landmark Arms Trade Treaty, which recently had its 50th ratification, includes a provision for arms exporting states to take into account the risk of conventional arms being used to commit or facilitate serious acts of gender-based violence against women and children.

On a broader scale, we will also be engaged in considering the more widespread risks posed to humanity as a whole from weapons of mass destruction. This includes the possibility of the theft, trafficking or sabotage of these weapons, to say nothing of the catastrophic dangers that would result as a consequence of a nuclear accident or miscalculation.

As we prepare to undertake our work, it is virtually impossible to for us to do so without contemplating the humanitarian impact and utter havoc that the proliferation of weapons of all types has had on people the world over; such as in Africa, where over 100 million small arms exist, or in Japan and the countries that have been used for atomic testing, where the actual real-life effects of radioactive fallout are a stark reality.

As we commence our work, I am mindful of the degree of responsibility that each of us bears in helping to create an international framework within which these deadly weapons of war, some of which are used with indiscriminate force, can either be totally eliminated or placed within regulatory constraints that ensure they are not misused.

We have much work to do in the time allocated. The Chair and the Bureau look forward to steering and managing this work. For my part, I pledge to do my utmost to ensure that the conduct of our deliberations does justice to the importance of the issues with which we are engaged.

Colleagues, as we stand at the cusp of the significant milestone that will be attained next year when we commemorate the seventieth year of our Organisation, I am reminded of the words of the great American industrialist, Henry Ford, who said:

"Coming together is a beginning;
Keeping together is progress;
Working together is success"

I look forward to working together with you and am confident that with your help we will enjoy a successful 69th session.