Remarks by Egypt- Thematic Discussion on Nuclear Weapons

Thank you Mr. Chairman,

Mr. Chairman, we hold this session of the First Committee amidst increasing tensions and open threats of using nuclear weapons, in addition to accusations among the States Party to the Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) of serious violations to this Treaty which is the cornerstone of the international security architecture and the nonproliferation regime. Furthermore, the Treaty’s credibility and sustainability have recently been subject to a significant damage at the 2015 Review Conference due to the disappointing decision of three States Party to the Treaty to block consensus to the benefit of a State that is not party to the treaty.

Egypt reiterates its concern over the grave threat posed to humanity by the continued existence of nuclear weapons, and reaffirms that the total, verifiable, and irreversible elimination of nuclear weapons, which represents the primary objective of the NPT, is the only guarantee against their proliferation, use, or threat of use.

Attaining this objective is not impossible, as some would want the world to believe. Ridding the world of such an existential threat should not, and must not, be dealt with as a naïve utopian dream. It is, in fact, a commitment that awaits implementation by the Nuclear-Weapon States (NWS) who undertook clear unequivocal obligations in this regard under article VI of the NPT. It is important to highlight that making the implementation of nuclear disarmament commitments conditional on unidentified improvements in the international security environment would only lead to counter-arguments making the implementation of the nonproliferation commitments dependant on the same ambiguous conditions. And that is a vicious cycle that leads to the gradual erosion of the credibility and sustainability of the NPT.

Even at the peak of the Cold War, when the international security environment was worse than the one we witness today, there have been were episodes of detente and constructive cooperation leading to reductions in nuclear weapons stockpiles. Nevertheless, these short-lived episodes were, unfortunately, ultimately suspended or sometimes even reversed. Progress in nuclear disarmament has always been a leading force for improving the international security environment and the levels of international cooperation. Thus, the stalemate in nuclear disarmament could be viewed as one of the root causes of
the deteriorating security environment which is paradoxically used as a pretext for not making progress in nuclear disarmament.

In this regard, Egypt welcomes the adoption of the landmark Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in July 2017. And we congratulate the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons on a well deserved Nobel Peace Prize. We believe that launching negotiations on the complete elimination of nuclear weapons within a specified time-frame is a necessary step that needs to be taken without further delay. Egypt has repeatedly demanded the implementation of the 13 Practical Steps agreed at the 2000 NPT Review Conference, as well as the relevant commitments of the 2010 Action Plan. The lack of the necessary political will to implement such commitments represents a major challenge.

Mr. Chairman,

Egypt considers the continued existence of nuclear weapons and the failure to achieve the universality of the NPT, especially in the region of the Middle East, to be one of the most pressing challenges to the international efforts in the field of disarmament. For over four decades, Egypt has strived to free the Middle East from nuclear weapons, and made this objective a top priority of its foreign policy. The grave dangers posed by the possession of such weapons by one State in the region represents one of the most pressing threats to the region's security, leaving it extremely prone to chronic armament races, conflicts, and instability.

Although more than twenty years have passed since the adoption of the 1995 Resolution on the Middle East, which formed the basis for the indefinite extension package of the NPT, the Resolution on the Middle East has remained far from implementation due to the lack of sufficient efforts by the international community. Egypt and the Arab Group have spared no effort to interact positively with all the relevant initiatives, and actively participated in good faith in all the meetings and conferences convened to negotiate the establishment of a zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East.

We are still of the view that the right way forward was outlined in the proposal presented by the Non-Aligned Movement in the 2015 NPT Review Conference, which was acceptable to all States Parties except three. This proposal aimed only to initiate negotiations on ridding the region from all WMDs, it did not dictate certain outcomes to these negotiations, and it did not exclude the opportunity to tackle the legitimate security concerns of any State in the region. Convening a Conference on freeing the Middle East of Nuclear Weapons and other Weapons of Mass Destruction, based on the principle of arrangements freely
arrived at, should be considered a historical opportunity for all States, in the region and beyond, to take a huge step towards achieving peace and collective security for all.

Mr. Chairman, In her introductory remarks, H.E. the UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs rightly stated that “The path to peace through disarmament does not lie waiting for the right security situation to materialize, while countries increase their military budgets and stockpiles year after year. On the contrary, measures for disarmament can build trust, reduce tensions and create the space to establish more durable and sustainable security mechanisms”.

It is in this spirit that we have tabled the annual two resolutions on the Middle East, namely the resolution presented by Egypt on the “Establishment of a NWFZ in the region of the Middle East” as well as the resolution presented by the Arab Group on “The Risk of Nuclear Proliferation in the Middle East”. We continue to seek the support of all MS to these two resolutions as a sign of their continued support commitment to the attainment of this goal and honoring the relevant obligations.

Mr. Chairman,

I would like to reiterate Egypt’s principled position regarding the full implementation of article IV of the NPT, and that particular importance should be attached to ensuring the exercise of the inalienable right of all the parties to the Treaty to develop research, production and use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes without discrimination.

Finally, Egypt continues to reject any restrictions on the peaceful uses of nuclear energy that go beyond the obligations of the NPT. Egypt is also concerned about the lack of implementation of the undertakings to facilitate participation in the fullest possible exchange of equipment, materials, and scientific and technological information for the peaceful uses of nuclear energy; the continued lack of assuring that the IAEA has the resources necessary to effectively meet its technical cooperation responsibilities; as well as the lack of transparency in nuclear-related export-controls.

Thank you Mr. Chairman