STATEMENT
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DURING GENERAL POLITICAL DEBATE IN THE FIRST COMMITTEE
OF THE 72ND SESSION OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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Mr. Chairman,

Allow me to congratulate you on the election to this high position and wish you success in your work.

The year since the end of the previous session of our Committee has been marked by a number of noteworthy developments, but the most resonant of them was, by all means, the elaboration by a large group of States of the treaty on the prohibition of nuclear weapons and its opening for signature. Regrettably, we cannot assess this Treaty positively. In its content it differs substantially from our vision of the ways for achieving a nuclear-weapon-free world. Nor is it consistent with the NPT provisions according to which the complete elimination of nuclear weapons should be carried out pursuant to the treaty on general and complete disarmament.

We respect the views of the proponents of prompt elimination of nuclear weapons. We share the goal of a nuclear-weapon-free world, but do understand that this is a long-term goal and its achievement should be gradual. The steps in this direction should be taken with the view of strengthening strategic stability and with due account of national security interests of all countries. As for the question of how and when the prohibition of nuclear weapons should be take place, the answer is that it would be appropriate at one of the final stages of nuclear disarmament process in order to make its results irreversible. Clearly, at this stage it is premature to set such a goal.

It should be noted that some treaty provisions raise very serious questions. For example, the treaty recognizes the right of its parties to withdraw in case of certain extraordinary circumstances by notification. This means that the prohibitions contained therein are reversible. Provided that we talk about the possibility for non-nuclear weapon States to abandon the prohibition of nuclear weapons, an immediate question arises whether it is compatible with NPT obligations.
Equally surprising is Article 18 that positions the ban treaty as superseding other existing international agreements. If it is so the parties to the treaty can forgo their obligations under other treaties, apparently also including NPT at their own discretion. If this is the case, is it fair to say that the new treaty strengthens the nuclear non-proliferation regime, as its authors claim?

Also alarming is the absence of clarity regarding a certain "competent international authority" called on to play a key role in the implementation of the treaty. As we understand, some of our partners are tempted to assign functions of such a body to the IAEA. We must most resolutely caution against it. Such attempts may turn out to be detrimental to the Agency which mandate and capabilities do not and should not have anything to do with nuclear disarmament and its verification.

We would like to confirm that, in light of all the circumstances, Russia does not intend to sign or ratify the new treaty. We call upon all the members of the international community to follow proven approaches to nuclear disarmament elaborated by consensus in the framework of NPT that have demonstrated their efficiency in practice. That is that nuclear disarmament must be implemented in such a way as to lead to strengthening international security and stability, and enhancing security of all States without exception. The Russian Federation intends to act precisely this way. Let me remind you that, in the past thirty years, based on bilateral agreements with the U.S., as well as unilaterally, Russia has made a tremendous contribution to advancing a nuclear-weapon-free world by reducing its nuclear potential by 85%. We continue this work in the framework of the START Treaty to reach its envisaged limitations on warheads, delivery vehicles and launchers by February 5, 2018.

Perhaps, many of those present here would like to ask what is next. Future will show. For instance, the existing START Treaty allows for its prolongation for another five years. We don't mind examining such an option, but that would require a willing partner.

In general, one have to recognize that the international environment is extremely unfavorable to consider options for further nuclear weapons reductions
due to a whole range of negative factors. One of them is the on-going unilateral build-up of global missile defense. This project has already considerably intoxicated the atmosphere in Europe. The same is now happening in Asia, especially due to deployment of the U.S. THAAD systems in South Korea and the intended stationing of American Aegis Ashore systems in Japan. The Russian and Chinese military experts will elaborate on dangerous consequences of the U.S. global-scale missile defense system at their joint briefing to be held here, at the UN headquarters, on October 12, 2017. We invite the First Committee delegations to the event.

Further steps in the area of nuclear disarmament have been also complicated due to the growing probability of weapons placement in outer space. Russia, along with many other States, is doing its utmost to prevent such a development. As early as in 2004, we made a political commitment not to be the first to place weapons in outer space (NFP). Today, 17 States fully participate in this initiative. Just recently, Vietnam has joined it. For the past few years, we have tabled a draft resolution in support of this initiative for consideration by the First Committee. It has enjoyed rather broad support. Last year 45 countries co-sponsored the resolution. 130 States voted in favor. We call on all the States that have not yet done so to co-sponsor the relevant draft resolution or, at least, vote in its favor. First of all, we speak about the EU Member States, if, of course, they are not indifferent to the topic of prevention of an arms race in outer space. So far they have preferred to abstain, referring to the lack of definition of "weapons in outer space" and to the absence of verification mechanism of compliance with NFP commitment. We find these arguments unconvincing. In fact, it is not a matter of a legally binding agreement, but of a political commitment and confidence-building measure not necessarily requiring verification procedures.

As to "weapons" definition, it is contained, along with other key provisions, in the Russia-China draft Treaty on the Prevention of Placement of Weapons in Outer Space. It remains tabled at the Geneva Conference on Disarmament and, hopefully, will be considered soon. Until this happens, we and our Chinese partners
propose to adopt during this session a resolution on establishing the UN Group of Governmental Experts on the Prevention of Arms Race in Outer Space (PAROS). This would allow for an in-depth examination of this topic to supplement and stimulate the on-going thematic discussions at the Conference on Disarmament on PAROS. We are looking forward to the broadest possible support of this draft resolution in the First Committee.

Distinguished Mr. Chairman,

This November we shall find ourselves in the middle of the current NPT review cycle. We believe that the first session of the Preparatory Committee for the upcoming Review Conference went rather well. However, the number of problems in the field of nuclear non-proliferation does not decrease. The nuclear problem of the Korean Peninsula remains a serious and even escalating challenge. Along with other countries we resolutely condemn the nuclear tests and ballistic missile launches conducted by Pyongyang in violation of the UN Security Council resolutions. We supported the recent sanction measures adopted by the UN Security Council. However, the sanctions are not a panacea. This problem can be settled only by political and diplomatic means. Pressure can be successful only when supported by active diplomacy and creative search for effective solutions. In this regard, Russia and China have put forward a joint roadmap for settlement. It implies that at the first stage Pyongyang will abstain from further testing, whereas the U.S. and South Korea will cease or, at least, reduce the scale of joint military exercises near the DPRK borders. At the same time, we regard the military option as totally unacceptable. We call on all parties, to whom it may concern, to abstain from provocations and belligerent rhetoric for the sake of creating more favorable conditions for political and diplomatic efforts.

The agreement on and successful implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Actions (JCPOA) for the settlement of the situation around the Iranian nuclear program have become a major success in the field of non-proliferation. We note with satisfaction that Teheran is fully complying with its obligations as repeatedly confirmed by the IAEA. It is essential that all parties to this agreement
treat it with utmost care. We cannot but be concerned with the tensions around the JCPOA that continue escalating for no apparent reason and in an absolutely artificial manner. There are statements that may ruin this agreement, as well calls to revise its provisions. Russia, like the absolute majority of States, is resolutely against it. Any attempt to make the JCPOA "better" threatens to break it. We call on all the partners to fully comply with the arrangements reached.

We are extremely concerned that during the first half of the current NPT review cycle we haven't moved an inch closer to the convening of the Conference on the nuclear-weapon- and other WMD-free zone in the Middle East. In fact, we are now at a deep impasse and prospects for a way-out are not in sight at the moment. This can have a rather negative impact on the 2020 NPT Review Conference. For this reason Russia within its possibilities is trying to help overcome this stagnation. During the first session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2020 NPT Review Conference last May we circulated the working document containing specific ideas regarding arrangements for further work. We note with satisfaction a like-minded approach of the UN Secretariat. During the current session of the First Committee we intend to conduct intensive consultations with the countries of the region on possible steps aimed at, inter alia, unblocking the preparatory work and holding the Conference on the Middle East WMD-free zone.

A few words about the situation with the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC). At the Review Conference last November all of us saw common mood to strengthen the regime of BWC which, despite its long-term existence, still remains a weak and amorphous agreement. Unfortunately, we were unable to agree on the program of effective work during the inter-sessional period due to the fact that in the last hours of the Conference, when the compromise was within reach, some countries refused to continue negotiations. Nevertheless, the final document included an important provision granting the Meeting of the BWC States Parties in the beginning of December this year the mandate to agree on an extensive work program for the remaining part of the inter-sessional period till 2021
and approve it by consensus. We call on all the Parties to the Convention not to miss this opportunity.

I would like to draw your attention to the Russian initiative on the elaboration at the Geneva Conference on Disarmament of a legally binding International Convention on Suppression of Acts of Chemical and Biological Terrorism. In particular, dangerous developments in some Middle Eastern countries prove the growing urgency of this topic. Meanwhile, the BWC and CWC elaborated in the last third of the 20th century do not provide us with full range of capabilities for combating terrorists who are trying to get hold of biological and chemical weapons and have, apparently, very much succeeded in this regard. The "added value" of the Russian initiative is that it helps us to overcome the two-decade impasse in the CD negotiations. Furthermore, unlike other agenda items of the Geneva Conference, it cannot be perceived by any country as detrimental to its national security interests. A new international convention would contribute to strengthening the legal framework for combating terrorism and thus would meet the interests of all States without exception. We note that the prevailing majority of CD participants either rather actively support this proposal, or say that they would not stand in the way of consensus if it is formed. We hope that those few States that are still skeptical would reconsider their position regarding this Convention.

Distinguished colleagues,

Exactly six months ago today, on April 4, a resonant incident involving the use of sarin took place in the Syrian town of Khan Sheikoun. Russia immediately called for conducting the most scrupulous, professional and objective investigation to identify and prosecute the perpetrators. So far, the attempts to start such an investigation failed. The OPCW Fact-Finding Mission did its job superficially and with grave violations of the established rules. It failed to comply with the basic chain of custody principle. As usual, the Mission conducted a remote investigation without visiting the site of the incident and Shayrat Airbase where sarin used in Khan Sheikoun had been allegedly stored. Therefore, we expect that the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism, that now started proceedings on the case, will
fill out the gaps in the work of the OPCW Mission and conduct a truly competent investigation, thus helping the UN Security Council to decide on the relevance of extending its mandate.

In conclusion, distinguished colleagues, let me draw the attention of the delegations to the fact that seven days ago Russia fully completed the process of elimination of its chemical arsenal and did it three years ahead of the previously established schedule. This is yet another testimony of Russia’s commitment to implementing the agreements in the sphere of disarmament.

Thank you for your attention.