

STATEMENT FOR THE OPENING OF THE 2016 OEWG ON NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT

Chairperson,

At the outset, South Africa would like to congratulate you on your assumption of the Chair of the OEWG on Nuclear Disarmament. My delegation assures you of our full support and cooperation towards fulfilling the mandate of this working group. May I also take this opportunity to thank His Excellency, Mr Kofi Annan for his presence and thought-provoking statement, which should inspire all of us.

Chairperson,

As the only country to have first developed and then voluntarily dismantled and destroyed its nuclear weapons capability, our experience illustrates that nuclear weapons do not guarantee security but rather undermines it. Given the catastrophic humanitarian impact of these weapons, we remain deeply concerned about the lack of meaningful progress towards nuclear disarmament, despite the various undertakings and commitments made by the nuclear-weapon States in 1995, 2000 and 2010. This was not what the international community envisaged when the UNGA adopted its first resolution in 1946, which sought to initiate a process to achieve "*the elimination from national armaments of atomic weapons and of all other major weapons adaptable for mass destruction*". The failure of the 2015 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference to reach consensus on an outcome document raised further questions regarding the commitment of some States to the implementation of these agreements and the legally-binding obligations under the Treaty.

Today, an estimated 1 800 nuclear warheads remain on high-alert status, ready to deploy within minutes. Similarly, nuclear weapons remain integral to the military and security doctrines of a number of States. In addition, vast public resources continue to be utilised for the retention and modernisation of nuclear weapons, which stands in sharp contrast to delivery of

development assistance in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Today, the costs related to nuclear weapons amount to roughly more than double the development assistance provided to Africa. This state of affairs is clearly not acceptable and sustainable in a world where the basic human needs of billions cannot be met.

As long as nuclear weapons exist, vertical and horizontal proliferation will persist and the threat to humanity will remain. For SA, nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation are mutually reinforcing processes -- the disregard of one has a direct impact on the advancement of the other. Undeniably, it is an anomaly that nuclear weapons remain the only weapons of mass destruction that have yet to be subjected to a global, multilateral legally-binding framework banning among others their production, use and development. Negotiations to prohibit and eliminate all nuclear weapons can no longer be postponed. The legal obligation to pursue nuclear disarmament is not a voluntary endeavor -- it is a shared responsibility of all states to achieve this ultimate goal. And the only way to guarantee this, is through a comprehensive legally-binding instrument or set of instruments, with clear timelines, benchmarks and a strong system of verification.

Chairperson,

In moving forward, it is our fervent hope that this working group will build on the work of the 2013 OEWG and lead to concrete outcomes that could form the basis for future work on nuclear disarmament. Given the inclusive and democratic nature of this OEWG, it presents yet another opportunity to all UN Members to make their voices heard on this important subject. Our belief is that this meeting should strive to reach agreement on what is necessary for both legally-binding effective measures and interim measures in order to advance multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations for the achievement and maintenance of a world free of nuclear weapons.

Chairperson,

In conclusion, allow me to leave you with the wise words of the global icon and former South African President, Nelson Mandela, who appealed to the

international community "...to remake our common world anew" as he argued that *"The violence we see all around us, against people who are as human as we who sit in privileged positions, must surely be addressed in a decisive...manner...The violence against which I speak is...the violence of war...and of the frightening threat which hangs over all humanity that is posed by the huge arsenals of weapons of mass destruction, and especially nuclear weapons, which remain in the stockpiles of a few countries in the world...The critical question of nuclear disarmament must remain high on our list of priorities..."*

I thank you

