STATEMENT BY SOUTH AFRICA
TO THE CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT
ON BEHALF OF THE NEW AGENDA COALITION (NAC)

19 June 2012

Mr President,

I have the honour of taking the floor on behalf of the seven members of the New Agenda Coalition (NAC): Brazil, Egypt, Ireland, Mexico, New Zealand, Sweden and my own country, South Africa.

The NAC wishes to congratulate you on your assumption of the Presidency of the Conference on Disarmament (CD) and to express our appreciation for your efforts aimed at finding a solution to the continuing impasse in the Conference.

At the outset, we also wish to thank the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Finland, H.E. Mr. Erkki Tuomioja for his participation in the Plenary this morning and to acknowledge the important role being played by Finland, in particular as the host government for the 2012 Conference on the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction to be attended by all States of the Middle East, as well as the appointment of Under Secretary of State Jaako Laajava of Finland as the facilitator. We look forward to the successful convening of this important Conference.

Mr President,

As members of the NAC, we have always supported the soonest commencement of substantive work on nuclear disarmament in the CD and regret that despite the efforts made by you, Mr President, as well as by previous Presidents that included a programme of work (CD1933/Rev.1) submitted under the Egyptian Presidency, the Conference has yet to break out of its long-standing deadlock.

No nuclear weapons, irrespective of their type or where they are located, can ever be safe in any hands, whether state or non-state actor. As long as these weapons exist, the possibility of their use, whether by accident or design, will remain. Similarly, as long as some states continue to possess them, citing security reasons for doing so, others may aspire to acquire them. The NAC therefore rejects any justification for the continued retention or presumption of the indefinite possession of nuclear weapons. This is clearly incompatible with the integrity and sustainability of the nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation regime and the goal of a nuclear-weapon-free world.

The only absolute guarantee against the use of nuclear weapons is their complete elimination and the assurance that they will never be produced again. As the NAC has always maintained, what does not exist cannot proliferate. As such, pending the total elimination of nuclear weapons, it is critical that all remaining challenges be tackled head-on. These include, amongst others, the commencement of substantive
work on nuclear disarmament, including the negotiation and conclusion of a non-discriminatory, multilateral and effectively verifiable treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons and other nuclear explosive devices that should fulfil both nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation objectives. In addition, the legitimate interest of the non-nuclear-weapons States (NNWS) in receiving unequivocal and legally-binding security assurances from the nuclear-weapon States (NWS) should be addressed.

Mr President,

While welcoming the progress made through the entry-into-force of the New START Agreement between the Russian Federation and the United States that has resulted in a reduction of the overall number of operationally deployed strategic nuclear weapons, the NAC continues to be concerned that several thousand nuclear warheads remain intact and that no progress can be discerned with respect to the reduction and elimination of nuclear weapons stationed outside the territories of the NWS.

Similarly, we are concerned about the continued modernisation of nuclear arsenals, together with the vast resources allocated for this purpose. The NAC reiterates that any reduction, as with all disarmament measures undertaken, must be irreversible, transparent and internationally verifiable. Linked to this is the continued role and significance of nuclear weapons in all military and security concepts, doctrines and policies. Regrettably, nuclear deterrence policies remain a defining characteristic of the military doctrines of NWS and the security alliances that they are party to. In this regard, the NAC recalls the agreements reached at the 2000 and 2010 NPT Review Conferences that further concrete measures that must be taken, including decreasing the operational readiness of nuclear weapon systems, with a view to ensuring that all nuclear weapons are removed from high alert status.

Mr President,

The entry-into-force of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) remains an important outstanding issue. It constitutes a core element of the international disarmament and non-proliferation regime – raising the threshold for the acquisition of nuclear weapons, preventing a qualitative arms race and reducing the reliance on nuclear weapons in security strategies.

Mr President,

The NAC recalls the founding agreement and the grand bargain struck by all State Parties to the NPT, where the NWS committed to nuclear disarmament, in return for which the NNWS undertook not to develop nuclear weapons. We also recall that in endorsing this agreement, all NPT State Parties affirmed the inalienable right to pursue the peaceful development of research, production and use of nuclear energy.

Significant progress has been made to meet the nuclear non-proliferation objectives of the NPT, limiting the horizontal proliferation of nuclear weapons. Whilst modest gains have been made towards our goal of a world free from nuclear weapons, the threat posed by nuclear weapons endures and the nuclear disarmament side of the NPT bargain has yet to be realised.

Indeed, the continued existence of nuclear weapons and the threat of their proliferation contradict the very commitments made by State Parties under the NPT,
as well as the positions expressed, including in this forum, by those outside the Treaty in support of a world free from nuclear weapons.

In order to achieve our vision of a nuclear-weapon-free world, the NAC believes that, among others, the following concrete actions should be undertaken:

- All states possessing nuclear weapons, whether inside or outside the NPT, must take concrete, systematic and progressive efforts with regard to nuclear disarmament. In addition, enhanced transparency measures, including regular reports, are vital to engender confidence that such efforts are being made;
- It is imperative that the follow-on measures to the New START agreement, aimed at achieving deeper reductions in nuclear arsenals, should address all deployed and non-deployed nuclear weapons, both strategic and non-strategic;
- There is an urgent need to develop adequate and efficient nuclear disarmament verification capabilities and legally-bounding verification arrangements. Efforts must be accelerated toward the development of multilateral arrangements for placing fissile material no longer required for military purposes under the supervision of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA);
- Given the indiscriminate and disproportionate nature of nuclear weapons, all states should reaffirm that their use would constitute a violation of international humanitarian law. In addition, there is a need to explore and further consider the catastrophic humanitarian consequences associated with them, including consistency with international law and particularly international humanitarian law;
- Those states that are part of military alliances, which include NWS should report, as a significant transparency and confidence-building measure, on steps taken or future steps planned to reduce and eliminate the role of nuclear weapons in collective security doctrines;
- All states should support the successful convening of the 2012 Conference on the establishment of a Middle East free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction;
- All states should work towards the construction of a comprehensive framework of mutually reinforcing instruments for the achievement and maintenance of a world without nuclear weapons. Such a legally-binding framework for the total elimination of all nuclear weapons must include clearly defined benchmarks and timelines, backed by a strong system of verification, in order to be efficient and credible;
- Although some positive progress has been made towards the entry-into-force of the CTBT, which was negotiated in this forum, further progress is urgently required.
- Lastly, no effort should be spared to achieve the universality of the NPT, and all states should desist from actions that can negatively affect prospects in this regard. India, Israel and Pakistan should join the NPT promptly and without conditions. Moreover, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) should rescind its announced withdrawal from the NPT and verifiably terminate its nuclear weapons programme.

Mr President,

Earlier this month we participated in the first Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) for the 2015 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). We wish to pay tribute to our colleague, H.E. Ambassador Woolcott of Australia for his role as Chair of the PrepCom, which facilitated a smooth start to the 2015 Review Cycle.
The Action Plan that emerged from the 2010 NPT Review Conference not only reaffirmed the commitment of the nuclear-weapon States (NWS) to unequivocally accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals leading to nuclear disarmament in accordance with Article VI of the Treaty, but also recommitted the NWS to accelerate progress on the steps agreed in 1995 and 2000 to advance the implementation of Article VI. Importantly, the Conference also reemphasised the commitment to apply the principles of irreversibility, verifiability and transparency in relation to nuclear disarmament measures.

The NAC recognises the initial steps that had been taken towards realising the agreed actions contained in the 2010 NPT Action Plan for a process leading to the full implementation of the 1995 Resolution on the Middle East, which is an essential element of the outcome of the 1995 Conference and of the basis on which the Treaty was indefinitely extended without a vote in 1995. We reiterate the continued validity of the 1995 Resolution and call upon all states to exert all efforts towards its full implementation.

The 2012 PrepCom has, once again, confirmed the commitment of State Parties to the NPT as the foundation of the nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation regime. This welcome reaffirmation, and the importance placed on the 2010 Action Plan as our guiding document in the short term are positive outcomes from the PrepCom. These must be capitalised upon in the coming years of the review cycle so that true progress can be made — and recognised — at the 2015 NPT Review Conference.

Mr President,

The NAC is disappointed that the CD has, despite intensified efforts, not been able to implement the three specific recommendations of the 2010 NPT Action Plan on nuclear disarmament due to the continued lack of consensus on a programme of work. The NAC calls on all states to work together to overcome obstacles within the international disarmament machinery, including in the CD, which are inhibiting efforts to advance the cause of nuclear disarmament in a multilateral context.

We stand ready to fully and constructively engage in a collective effort towards the construction of a comprehensive legally-binding framework of mutually reinforcing instruments for the achievement and maintenance of a world without nuclear weapons. Given the threat posed and the catastrophic humanitarian consequences associated with the use of these instruments of mass annihilation, this task must no longer be postponed.

I thank you.