STATEMENT BY

THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

ON NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT

(NEW YORK, MAY 2004)

(CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY)
Mr. Chairperson,

At the outset, my delegation would like to fully associate itself with the statement made by the New Agenda Coalition, as well as the statement delivered by Malaysia on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement. Our statement on the issue of nuclear disarmament will therefore be brief and will seek only to add more general remarks to the aforementioned statements.

Mr. Chairperson,

In South Africa's view, there can be no doubt that the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) remains the foundation of nuclear disarmament. In this context it should always be recalled that the Treaty represents a historical bargain between the nuclear weapon States and the non-nuclear weapon States in terms of which the non-nuclear weapon States have undertaken not to aspire to nuclear weapons based upon the reciprocal undertaking by the nuclear weapon States to eliminate their nuclear weapons.

The 2000 NPT Review Conference consensus agreement on the "unequivocal undertaking by the nuclear weapon States to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals leading to nuclear disarmament to which all States parties are committed" was only intended to be a first step in this process. To fulfill their obligations under the Treaty, both the nuclear weapon States and the non-nuclear weapon States were to implement the practical steps for systematic and progressive efforts to eliminate nuclear weapons. During this PrepCom, we have repeatedly heard the almost unanimous expression of concern by the non-nuclear weapon States that the nuclear weapon States have not fulfilled their part of this bargain.

Mr. Chairperson,

A growing sense of concern for my delegation is what appears to be a repeated attempt by some States Parties to roll back and negate the agreements that they have made under the NPT umbrella. This is an approach that should be resisted at all times, whether it relates to the practical step dealing with the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT); the principle of irreversibility; the Treaty on the Limitation of Anti-Ballistic Missile Systems (ABM) and strategic stability; or the requirements for work to be undertaken by the PrepCom, or the Review Conference itself.

We should not be mistakenly lured into a false sense of complacency when these attempts are only perceived to be dealing with procedural issues. A negation of any aspect of the agreements reached under the NPT umbrella undermines the veracity of other agreements that may be considered by all, or some, as being of greater and/or more substantive importance. If we fail to ensure that agreements reached are implemented and fulfilled, the danger exists that the Treaty will continue to follow a circular path of continuous attempts to again and again reach agreements on issues that had been agreed to and dealt with previously. Stark examples of this practice are the 1995 and 2000 agreements calling for signatures, ratifications and the early entry into force of the CTBT.
which must now again be promoted; the 1990, 1995 and 2000 agreements on security assurances, which must now also again be promoted; and the attempt by certain nuclear weapon States to reinterpret or undermine the unequivocal nuclear disarmament undertaking, which we are obligated to continually reinforce.

In our view it is critical that the States Parties should unite to actively and consistently oppose such practices. The proponents of such practices should also be reminded that undermining one agreement reached in the context of the NPT undermines all such agreements, including on issues that may be of particular importance to them. One cannot undermine one part of an agreement and hope that other parts will continue to have the same force, or that others will not in turn attempt to follow the same practice.

One is forced to wonder whether a failed determination to fully implement all of the provisions and objectives of the Treaty and to achieve the agreements that have been reached under the NPT umbrella is not in some way linked to the threat of proliferation that has so starkly confronted us since 1995, when the NPT was indefinitely extended. In 1995, the States Parties faced a situation where there were five nuclear weapon States. Today the States Parties are confronted by a situation of five nuclear weapon States, four nuclear weapons capable States and by at least one case where nuclear weapons capabilities have been aspired to. In other words, and in the short period of only ten years, the NPT has at one or other stage been confronted by at least a doubling of the nuclear weapons threat. This, in the space of a period when we believed that the indefinite extension of the NPT was to provide for a diminished -- not an increased -- threat, which has now been exacerbated ever further by the possibility that nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction capabilities can fall into the hands of terrorists.

Mr. Chairperson,

My delegation continues to hold the view that the issues of nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation are inextricably linked and intertwined and in this sense represent two sides of the same coin. It is therefore important to recognize that progress on both fronts is required if we seriously wish to attain our often-repeated goal of a world free from the scourge of nuclear weapons.

Whilst this concept is not new, it would appear as though States Parties to the NPT continue to place emphasis on one or the other of these aspects, without seeing both as fundamental steps in ridding the world of nuclear weapons. Sadly, Mr. Chairperson, this position was again reflected during the General Debate of this PrepCom, during which States Parties placed a restrictive emphasis on preferred aspects of the Treaty to the detriment of others. It is not prudent for any of us to argue that all is well with any one particular aspect of the Treaty -- be it nuclear disarmament, nuclear non-proliferation, safeguards, or peaceful uses -- or to attempt to argue that one such aspect outweighs the others.
The Treaty must be implemented in all its aspects without favour or prejudice. It is not prudent to hold out any privilege or favoured right to the detriment of the Treaty as a whole. No aspect should be allowed to lag behind any other. No aspect should be more strictly enforced or require stricter implementation than any other. As a multilateral instrument, which was negotiated and equally agreed to by the members of the international community, all aspects of the Treaty must be implemented equally. It may be a difficult balance to maintain, but it is a balance that must be maintained.

Mr. Chairperson,

South Africa believes that we ignore the interrelationship between nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation at our own peril. The longer nuclear weapons exist, the longer the world will have to wait to be free from the use or threat of use of such weapons. The longer fears will persist that such weapons could also fall into the wrong hands. The longer the devastation of another Hiroshima or Nagasaki will hang like a sword of Damocles over the heads of the peoples of the world. Clearly, Mr. Chairperson, this cannot be what we want for the peoples of today, or for the generations yet to come.

Few would disagree that the possibility that nuclear weapons could be used represents a continued risk to humanity. It therefore appears obvious that the only real guarantee against the use of such weapons is their complete elimination and the assurance that they will never be produced again. The onus to effect nuclear disarmament -- that is to say, getting rid of nuclear weapons -- primarily rests on those States that possess such weapons.

Nuclear non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament will remain mutually reinforcing processes that will require continuous and irreversible progress on both fronts. In addition -- and as my delegation has already pointed out during the General Debate -- it has been agreed between us that nuclear disarmament is not part of some "ultimate" objective, but a milestone to be reached on the way to the real objective of the disarmament process, namely general and complete disarmament.

Mr. Chairperson,

In the isolated environment of NPT meetings it is apparent that we talk of nuclear weapons as purely inanimate objects, reciting numbers growing or numbers diminishing. The horror of the use of nuclear weapons sometimes appears to be lost in the mountains of statements and paperwork that we generate. Perhaps we should regularly walk out of the confines of this room and take a moment to look at the nightmarish exhibition that has been brought to the doorstep of this room by the peoples of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, of the consequences of the use of nuclear weapons. Once a person has looked at these indescribable and unspeakable horrors, then one is forced to revisit the real meaning of the work that we are undertaking.
When speaking of nuclear weapons, we should also always remind ourselves of the quote from the Bhagavad Gita that haunted Robert Oppenheimer at the time of the first nuclear explosion: “Now I have become death, the destroyer of worlds”.

Mr. Chairperson, in conclusion,

In view of the importance that not only South Africa, but all States Parties, associates with the issue of nuclear disarmament, my delegation strongly supports the Non-Aligned Movement and New Agenda Coalition proposals for this PrepCom to recommend the establishment of a subsidiary body on nuclear disarmament to the 2005 Review Conference. As indicated in the New Agenda Coalition statement in the General Debate of this PrepCom, this subsidiary body should be mandated to focus on the further elaboration of the practical steps for the systematic and progressive efforts towards nuclear disarmament.

Mr. Chairperson, I thank you.