STATEMENT
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AT THE FIRST SESSION OF THE PREPARATORY COMMITTEE FOR THE
2010 REVIEW CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES
TO THE TREATY ON THE NON-PROLIFERATION OF NUCLEAR
WEAPONS

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Chairperson,

At the outset, let me state clearly and unambiguously that South Africa is a proponent of nuclear disarmament and a supporter of a nuclear weapon-free world. In this regard, the views of my country on the important issue of nuclear disarmament have already on a number of occasions been expressed in the NPT context, as well as in other multilateral disarmament fora.

There is no doubt that the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) is vital to achieve nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation. It still remains the only international instrument that not only seeks to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons, but that also contains the legal commitment for their elimination. In this regard, it represents a historical bargain between the nuclear-weapon States and the non-nuclear-weapon States in terms of which the latter have undertaken not to aspire to nuclear weapons based upon the reciprocal undertaking by the former to eliminate their nuclear weapons.

Chairperson,

The threat to humanity posed by chemical and biological weapons has long been recognised and has led to the banning of these weapons of mass destruction. If the indiscriminate destruction posed by chemical and biological weapons is unacceptable, then the continued retention of the nuclear weapons option surely cannot be justified and maintained. It is obvious that the only absolute guarantee against the use of such weapons is their complete elimination and the assurance that they will never be produced again. It is this logic that led my country to abandon the nuclear weapons option and to destroy its nuclear deterrent capability.

As long as some countries have nuclear weapons, there will be others who will also aspire to possess them. South Africa believes that the continued possession of nuclear weapons, or the retention of the nuclear weapons option by some States, creates the very real danger that they may be used, or fall into the hands of non-State actors.

My country remains concerned over the huge number of nuclear weapons deployed and stockpiled around the world and the consequent possibility of their use. In the past nuclear weapons were developed for deterrence. However, after the end of the cold war several nuclear-weapon States now speak about their actual use and in pursuit of this objective new nuclear weapons are being planned and old ones are being modernised.

We are convinced that the possession of nuclear weapons -- or the pursuit of such possession by certain States -- does not enhance international peace and security. South Africa does not subscribe to the view that nuclear disarmament is part of some "ultimate" objective, but rather that it is a milestone to be reached on the way to the real objective of the disarmament process, namely general and complete disarmament.

Chairperson,

The primary responsibility for undertaking the necessary steps for the elimination of nuclear weapons lies with the nuclear-weapon States. It is therefore incumbent upon these States to engage without delay in an accelerated process of negotiations, thus achieving nuclear disarmament to which they have committed themselves under Article VI of the Treaty.

South Africa warmly welcomed the unequivocal undertaking by the nuclear-weapon States at the 2000 NPT Review Conference to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals. However, whilst we remained dissatisfied with the lack of progress by the nuclear-weapon States that would demonstrate progress on their commitment to the unequivocal undertaking, we are particularly encouraged by the recent statement of a nuclear-weapon State, in our general exchange of views last week, reaffirming its unequivocal undertaking to the disarmament measures contained in the 1995 and 2000 Review Conference decisions and final document. We call upon the other nuclear-weapon States to also reaffirm the same commitment.
Such a renewed commitment by the other nuclear-weapon States to nuclear disarmament will demonstrate the validity of the core bargain that was struck in the NPT namely that the overwhelming majority of States have entered into legally-binding commitments not to receive, manufacture or otherwise acquire nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices on the basis of the corresponding legally-binding commitments by the nuclear-weapon States to the pursuit of nuclear disarmament.

Equally important in the nuclear disarmament process, is the need to diminish the role of nuclear weapons in security policies so as to enhance strategic stability, facilitate the process of the elimination of these weapons and contribute to international confidence and security. This will counteract emerging approaches to the broader role of nuclear weapons as part of security strategies, including rationalizations for the use, and the possible development of new types, of nuclear weapons. It is in this context that we were disappointed to learn about the decision of the UK on the Trident to maintain its nuclear deterrent. This could have been a landmark decision for others to follow, which could have provided the necessary impetus to a disarmament process that desperately needs to be reinvigorated.

Irreversibility also forms an essential component of the arms control process, particularly insofar as reductions in the number of nuclear weapons are concerned. My delegation believes that the further reduction of nuclear weapons would underpin the international community’s endeavours to achieve nuclear disarmament and strengthen international peace, stability and security. Like other States, South Africa therefore welcomes and encourages bilateral nuclear arms reductions, as well as unilateral steps which have been undertaken by some Nuclear Weapon States. However, one should not confuse nuclear arms reductions with nuclear disarmament, as a commitment to such reductions does not automatically translate into a commitment to nuclear disarmament and to a vision of a world free of nuclear weapons.

Chairperson,

When discussing the question of nuclear disarmament, we seem to search for new solutions that would bring about the implementation of Article VI of the NPT. However we need look no further than the 1995 “Principles and Objectives” and the 13 practical and progressive steps for nuclear disarmament agreed to in 2000 to find a blueprint for a step-by-step process that would reduce the threat of nuclear weapons, de-emphasize their importance and lead to their elimination. The Final Document of the 2000 Conference, for instance, outlines detailed elements in a balanced way in both the areas of nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation.

The States Parties to the NPT cannot choose to selectively apply outcomes of the Treaty-based system that suit them in particular circumstances or at a given time, in this regard, the accomplishments that have been achieved in the implementation of the NPT and of the agreements and undertakings reached at the 1995 and 2000 NPT Review Conferences are a mixed bag. While progress has been achieved in expanding the application of the non-proliferation provisions of the Treaty, the same cannot be said for nuclear disarmament. It is true that the periods since 1995 and 2000 have witnessed developments that have impacted negatively on the goal of nuclear weapons non-proliferation. Nevertheless, the overwhelming majority of the non-nuclear-weapon States Parties to the NPT have continued to demonstrate their full commitment to, and compliance with, their Treaty obligations.

It would be fair to say that the primary goal of the States Parties to the NPT to achieve the full implementation of the Treaty, as well as its universality, remains beset by challenges. Pressure appears to be waning on the three States not yet parties to the NPT to accede to the Treaty as non-nuclear-weapon States promptly and without conditions.

While South Africa welcomes the developments following negotiations in the Six Party Talks and looks forward to the implementation of the terms of the agreement by all parties involved, it is important that the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea should fully and verifiably terminate its nuclear weapons programme, return to the NPT, sign and ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), and open all its nuclear facilities and materials to comprehensive IAEA safeguards inspections and surveillance.
The challenges to the NPT relate to all the pillars of the Treaty and range from nuclear disarmament and the peaceful uses of nuclear energy to nuclear non-proliferation and the application of safeguards. The imbalance in the emphasis that is placed on the various purposes and provisions of the Treaty by different States Parties does nothing to assist us in addressing these challenges, and neither does the failure to recognise that all the purposes and provisions of the Treaty are dependant upon one-another.

Chairperson,

We should not deliberately ignore the core bargain of the NPT where States undertook not to aspire to nuclear weapons on the basis that all States Parties would work for their elimination. Neither should we heighten tensions within the NPT by entrenching divisions that may lead us to greater problems in the future. We should also avoid undue reliance on the UN Security Council that may hold potential negative consequences for the NPT.

In recent years a great deal of attention has been paid to the threat of nuclear proliferation. My delegation has more than once stated that we ignore the interrelationship between nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation at our peril and that real and irreversible movement on nuclear disarmament would reinforce the irreversibility of non-proliferation. In this regard I wish to repeat South Africa's view that the issues of nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation are inextricably linked, and that both therefore require continuous and irreversible progress. Our approach to proliferation should recognize it as a global challenge requiring cooperation at an international level.

In conclusion, Chairperson,

South Africa remains concerned at the slow pace of progress with regard to steps to be taken by the nuclear-weapon States leading to nuclear disarmament. The various elements of these steps have consistently been supported by South Africa, including the need for increased transparency, the further reduction of non-strategic nuclear weapons, and the engagement of all the nuclear-weapon States in the process leading to the total elimination of their nuclear weapons, to name but a few.

South Africa has on numerous occasions, and in various disarmament fora, called for progress in the pursuit of these steps, and we will continue to do so. We will likewise continue to promote the full implementation and universality of the NPT as the cornerstone of nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation. We remain committed to nuclear disarmament and to the elimination of all nuclear weapons, and to the process that will lead us to that shared goal.

I thank you