Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Delegates:

I am pleased and privileged to address this Committee.

International civil society has high expectations at the dawn of a new review cycle for the most consequential arms control agreement in history: the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. We see this as a renewed opportunity for the international community to take concrete steps toward the complete elimination of nuclear weapons—without exceptions or exemptions—and to display the genuine political will necessary to see these steps through.

The expectation of progress toward the elimination of nuclear weapons is neither new nor outside the scope of the Treaty. Quite the contrary: the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons lies at the very heart of the NPT’s raison d’être and remains a foundational objective of the United Nations more than six decades after its creation. But to achieve this goal, states must go beyond diplomatic formalities and provide unequivocal political, technical and financial support for nuclear disarmament as a shared objective in the best interest of all nations.

Unfortunately, however, the international community has allowed this issue to drift endlessly without resolution despite overwhelming evidence that nuclear weapons lack any legal, political, military or moral justification.

Our conviction that nuclear weapons must and can be eliminated is not based on a naive or crude understanding of international relations. Civil society organizations are fully aware that some states enshrine nuclear weapons in their national security doctrines and strategies. But the case has been made, from several disciplines, repeatedly and convincingly, that any perceived benefits of nuclear weapons possession are based on fallacious paradigms and, in any case, are far outweighed by the threat posed by these weapons to civilization itself.

It is thus imperative to begin conscientious work toward a global, legal ban on the development, possession, and use of nuclear weapons without further delay. Under the NPT, every state party has a responsibility to ensure that these negotiations both begin and come to a conclusion. The details of disarmament and verification aspects, as well as timelines can all be worked out through the process – that is the very purpose of negotiations. But they must begin now. Such a ban, which is long overdue, would address the two primary concerns straining the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime: the actual possession of nuclear weapons by a few states, and the desire of others to emulate such behaviour and pursue nuclear weapons of their own.
Mr. Chairman,

Vague declarations affirming support in principle for the eventual goal of a world free of nuclear weapons do not suffice. That page has been turned. There is near-universal agreement that no justification exists to subject humanity to the existential risk posed by these weapons. Actual work to move this issue forward would include a timeline or provisions for the needed political, technical and legal preparations. This forum, at a minimum, must recognize that nuclear weapons pose an unacceptable threat to humanity and must therefore be eliminated. Reiterations of this fact are not evidence of renewed political will to advance the nuclear disarmament agenda.

While there is widespread agreement in principle on the end goal, we are deeply concerned that the process to achieve it has failed to bear fruit. Despite countless exhortations from the highest levels to begin their negotiating responsibilities, the Conference on Disarmament has, once again, failed to agree on a program of work. The time has come to examine other avenues that can deliver a global, legal ban on nuclear weapons.

After more than 40 years of the Treaty’s existence, the promise of nuclear disarmament still seems out of reach. And copious amounts of money—an estimated 1 trillion USD over the next 10 years—are being spent to modernize nuclear weapons systems. Qualitative improvements are not disarmament. There are more nuclear-armed states today than there were when the Treaty was signed. Holdout states still block the Treaty’s aspiration to universality. Clandestine attempts have been made to acquire nuclear weapons and proliferation concerns continue to strain the nuclear disarmament regime. The only way to ensure that the goals enshrined in the Treaty more than 40 years ago are achieved is to commence negotiations on a comprehensive, global ban on nuclear weapons.

Despite assertions to the contrary by some states, preparatory work for a legal ban on nuclear weapons is not premature. Real progress on this issue cannot be further postponed. After decades of waiting for all pillars of the Treaty to be strictly upheld, the need and impetus for all states parties to take concrete steps toward nuclear disarmament are anything but ‘premature’.

Mr. Chairman,

We have witnessed in disappointment how NPT review cycles have come and gone with little change in the business-as-usual attitude of nuclear-weapons states regarding the blatant disregard for their obligation to disarm. And agreements that are hailed as positive outcomes of these Conferences are often a reiteration of vague principles and existing obligations that do little more than perpetuate the nuclear status quo.

The 2010 Review Conference, for example, was hailed by many as a success as it produced a Final Document, which notably contained a section cleverly called an “Action Plan.” However, with few exceptions, the items in this plan either do not constitute actions or refer to pre-existing obligations.

Action 1, for example, asks states to “pursue policies that are fully compatible with the Treaty”—an obvious prior obligation by virtue of membership in the NPT. Action 3 calls on nuclear weapon states to undertake further efforts to “ultimately eliminate” nuclear weapons. Ultimately—a qualifier so vague it liberates NWS from any immediate obligation.
Action 20 urges states to “submit regular reports” as part of the NPT’s review process. This is a pre-existing obligation that is nonetheless inconsistently followed. Compliance with reporting obligations not only enhances transparency but advances the notion that all NPT states parties are accountable for their efforts to implement the Treaty.

Action 61 “encourages states, on a voluntary basis, to minimize civilian HEU stocks where technically and economically feasible.” In this case, carefully included caveats make the prospect of actual compliance unacceptably low.

Despite past failures, we must see the beginning of the 2015 Review Cycle as an opportunity to break from past timidity and take concerted actions that can lay a strong foundation for a global ban on nuclear weapons.

Mr. Chairman,

Several concerns merit increased attention in the review cycle that begins this year:

To start, the problematic disarmament/non-proliferation nexus needs to be fully recognized. The pervasive notion that the primary problem of nuclear weapons is the risk of their proliferation, and not their very existence, cannot be further perpetuated. To be absolutely clear: the main problem with the existence of nuclear weapons is the existence of nuclear weapons. Proliferation concerns are important and legitimate, but they will never be fully allayed unless the responsibility to disarm is taken seriously by NWS. States that continue to cling to the dubious doctrine of nuclear deterrence are clearly not living up to their NPT commitments, and it is imperative that they abide by the obligation to disarm under Article VI of the Treaty.

The discriminatory nature of the NPT is untenable. We reject the lopsided logic by which the very states that have developed, stockpiled, tested, and used nuclear weapons deem themselves fit to chastise others on the risks of proliferation. The moral high ground claimed by NWS is built upon an extremely weak and inherently unjust foundation.

The imbalance between disarmament and non-proliferation obligations is highly problematic, and the former cannot be understood to be a mere exhortation while the latter is a hard obligation. The double standard perpetuated by nuclear weapon states’ unwillingness to irreversibly disarm weakens otherwise valid concerns about proliferation dangers. It generates strong proliferation pressures. And it creates disincentives for non-nuclear weapon states to continue adhering to their non-proliferation commitments.

We are also highly skeptical of the discriminatory approach used by NWS in their efforts to prevent proliferation. While these states impose harsh economic sanctions and even threaten preemptive military strikes against those merely suspected of pursuing a nuclear weapons capability, they turn a blind eye to the undisputed, illicit and continued development and possession of nuclear weapons and their delivery systems by others that remain outside the Treaty. Such policies undermine not only the very foundation of the NPT, but the peace, security, and international law of the world community. Beyond the specific obligations contained in the Treaty, the discriminatory nature of the broader nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime offends a fundamental sense of justice and equality among nations.
The NPT’s aspirations to universality have been weakened by the actions of some states that have put commercial interests before the spirit and precepts of the Treaty. NWS have engaged, with the questionable sanction of the Nuclear Suppliers Group, in nuclear cooperation agreements with countries outside of the NPT. It defies logic that the NSG would allow an exemption that would, in effect, ‘reward’ a country that is neither a member of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty nor a signatory of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. This sets a troubling precedent. When others choose to engage in similar behaviour it will be hard to argue that such dealings could heighten regional tensions and undermine the aspirations to universality of the NPT, when the same conduct has already been previously allowed.

Restrictions on transfers of sensitive technology are a way to enhance and sustain the non-proliferation regime - and to create the conditions for comprehensive nuclear disarmament. The Nuclear Suppliers Group agreed in 2011 to strengthen guidelines governing the transfer of nuclear fuel cycle facilities, including the adoption of an additional protocol by receiving countries. However, NSG guidelines are just that- guidelines- that are not binding, or universally accepted, nor do they restrict transfers of enrichment or reprocessing technology. Much better would be a policy to discourage acquisition of enrichment and reprocessing technology, which of course can be used to make materials for bombs as well as reactors. One major supplier, the United States, adopted such a policy in 2009 in relation to nuclear trade agreements, only recently to backtrack due to competitive pressures. The commercial interests of the nuclear industry cannot be allowed to override non-proliferation and disarmament objectives. Further, in developing a comprehensive disarmament regime, provision must be made for multilateral control of nuclear fuel production rigorously and equally applied to all states involved.

As we move toward a global legal ban on nuclear weapons, the pursuit of related goals, such as the ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, or negotiations on a fissile materials treaty is welcome and encouraged. But such pursuits cannot be allowed to impede progress on the ultimate goal of nuclear disarmament. The contention that achieving success in processes such as CTBT ratification or FMCT negotiations are a necessary precondition for preparatory work for a ban on nuclear weapons is essentially flawed. The misguided requirement for a strict sequence must give way to parallel processes that advance various agendas, including preparatory work for the end goal itself.

Mr. Chairman,

The U.S. and Russia maintain over 1,000 mainly silo-based warheads that can be launched in less than two minutes - the same high-alert status they had at the height of the Cold War. But the Cold War ended more than two decades ago. Today, when the international community is more interconnected than ever and various mechanisms are in place to address international disagreements peacefully, there is absolutely no justification for keeping these arsenals on hair-trigger alert.

A number of documented computer glitches and human errors over the years have resulted in false warnings of nuclear attack. In these cases, an unintended nuclear war has been prevented only by hasty decisions by military personnel and political leaders under the severe pressure of a dreadfully brief time window.

This concern is anything but new. Going back more than a decade, several resolutions at the UN General Assembly have called for de-alerting. Most recently, in 2010 a resolution by Switzerland, Malaysia, Nigeria, New-Zealand, and Chile on operational readiness achieved an overwhelming majority vote of 157-3. As well, the call for de-alerting, or lowering operational readiness, figured
prominently in the Final Document of the last Review Conference. The lowering of alert status of nuclear forces to maximize presidential and senior military decision-making time would dramatically lessen the possibility of an accidental nuclear catastrophe.

Mr. Chairman,

The 28 heads of state and government of NATO countries will soon meet in Chicago. One of their tasks at this summit is to adopt a Defence and Deterrence Posture Review—an analysis of the ‘appropriate mix’ of nuclear weapons, conventional weapons, missile defence, and arms control needed to meet future security challenges.

It is disconcerting to see that U.S. nuclear weapons continue to be forward deployed in Non-Nuclear Weapons States. The acquiescence of these NNWS to this arrangement and the training of their pilots to drop nuclear bombs belonging to NWS run contrary to the letter and intent of Article II under the NPT. Likewise, the stationing of nuclear weapons in NNWS constitutes a clear violation of the non-transfer duty of NWS under Article I of the Treaty. NATO nuclear sharing policies are a clear and easily removed obstruction on the path to a nuclear weapons free world.

Non-nuclear weapon states that rely on positive security assurances from nuclear weapons states have a responsibility to reduce the role that nuclear weapons play in their national security strategies. Although not officially NWS, these states are materially complicit in the perpetuation of security doctrines that justify the continued existence of nuclear weapons. We call upon them to formulate security arrangements that do not rely on nuclear weapons or nuclear deterrence and to take immediate steps to remove nuclear weapons from their territory. As well, NATO should end its policy of nuclear sharing so that the 25 members of the alliance who do not have their own nuclear weapons can return to compliance with the treaty.

Mr. Chairman,

We hope that all national delegates present share our view that a world free of nuclear weapons is not a vague and distant aspiration, but a concrete goal that can be achieved in our lifetime. We therefore urge all states represented at this committee to embrace the opportunity, indeed the urgent need, to respond to the groundswell of support for a nuclear weapons-free world from all corners of the globe, and to fully comply with their obligations under the Treaty.

In particular, we urge all states that are in full compliance with the Treaty—the vast majority of NPT states parties—to firmly demand concrete steps toward nuclear disarmament from the very few that would hold the world hostage. We trust that states are empowered by the far-reaching global support for disarmament and call upon them expend all necessary political capital, economic leverage, and any other peaceful means of persuasion to demand that NWS take their nuclear disarmament obligation seriously and all parties are in full compliance with the Treaty. Nuclear disarmament must constitute a foreign policy priority for all nations. The stakes are that high. The cause is that worthy.

The intention of civil society is not to be adversarial in this process, which we stand ready to assist. But in capitals around the world there must be a clear recognition that our call for concrete progress toward a world free of nuclear weapons constitutes the exercising of a fundamental right to hold governments accountable. We are not a haphazard group of superfluous spectators, and our interest in this matter is neither random nor capricious. We represent the views and beliefs of important segments of the constituencies of the elected governments represented here today.
Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Delegates:

The calls to address the fundamental injustices underpinning this Treaty and for nuclear disarmament are getting louder and more persistent. The urgent need of a global legal ban of nuclear weapons has been justified in ample measure by scientists, legal scholars, mayors and parliamentarians, as well as active and retired diplomats and statesmen, from both nuclear-armed and non-nuclear weapons states. It is high time the international community listen to their collective wisdom. We will continue to urge progress and scrutinize results. And decision makers will be increasingly held accountable by their constituents for their failure to act. As they should be.

Thank you very much.