Second Session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2015 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference  
(Geneva, 22nd April – 3 May 2013)  

Statement by Mr Jean-Hugues Simon-Michel  
Ambassador, Permanent Representative of France  
to the Conference on Disarmament  
Head of the French Delegation  

“Chapter I”  

(Genève, 24 April 2013)  

Mr Chair,  

France fully adheres to the speech delivered on this cluster in the name of the European Union.  

I would like to build on this speech by adding a few points from France.  

Firstly, **France would like to underline that it will shoulder the particular responsibilities** that are incumbent upon nuclear-weapon-States in terms of disarmament.  

France is determined to seek a safer world for all and to create the conditions for a world without of nuclear weapons, in accordance with the goals of the NPT, in a way that promotes international stability and based on the principle of undiminished security for all, underlining the vital importance of non-proliferation for achieving this goal.  

The two P5 Follow-up Conferences that have been held since we last met in Vienna, one in Washington in June 2012 and the other last week in Geneva under the aegis of the Russian Federation, demonstrate the determination of the nuclear-weapon-States to strive to fully meet their commitments by 2015. France participated in the movement in 2011 by organizing the first P5 Follow-up Conference in Paris after the 2010 NPT Review Conference.  

These Conferences are useful forums for exchange both on factors influencing strategic stability – such as proliferation crises – and on concrete national policy matters. They enhance mutual confidence, which is vital to make progress on disarmament. In Washington and Geneva, we discussed the progress of work on terminology, transparency and reporting, so as to be able to report in 2014 on the results of our efforts and the progress made in the framework of our commitments, including those linked to Actions 5, 20 and 21 of the 2010 NPT Action Plan.  

Along with the other nuclear-weapon-States, we have also made progress on the matter of nuclear-weapon-free zones. We are ready to sign the Protocol to the Bangkok Treaty on the Southeast Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone as soon as possible. In addition, the dialogue between the P5 and Central Asian countries on the Treaty of Semipalatinsk is resuming with a view to finding acceptable solutions for all stakeholders to the difficulties which have been identified. Lastly, I recall that we signed a parallel declaration with Mongolia on its nuclear-weapons-free status.
France is already a party to the relevant protocols of the Tlatelolco, Rarotonga and Pelindaba Treaties. The signature of the protocols related to the two other nuclear-weapon-free zones would supplement the regime which already allows almost 100 States to benefit from negative security assurances given by France in the framework of the implementation of these instruments.

I know that our partners in the Middle East were deeply disappointed by the postponement of the conference on the establishment of a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems in the Middle East. This conference was one of the major measures of the 2010 Final Document. However, the Cycle is not over, and the facilitator, Ambassador Jaakko Laajava, has until now produced remarkable work to create the favourable conditions to hold the conference as soon as possible with all stakeholders. This is an important achievement which we must build on. We feel that these opportunities need to be seized to advance the process.

Mr Chair,

Permit me now to recall the progress made by France in recent years.

We have met the target, announced in 2008, of reducing the airborne component of our deterrence force by one third.

This latest progress supplements an already considerable achievement.

We have completely dismantled the ground-to-ground component of our deterrent and reduced the submarine component by one third. In total, France has reduced its arsenal by half over the last 20 or so years, unilaterally. It now has fewer than 300 nuclear warheads; We were the first State to ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, along with the United Kingdom, and to dismantle our nuclear test site;

We unilaterally dismantled the facilities for the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons, with a total cost of €6 billion. This is not a decision which we could go back on. It is an irreversible gesture. We ceased the production of plutonium for nuclear weapons in 1992 and took a similar step in 1996 regarding highly enriched uranium.

Mr Chair,

France is naturally aware of the serious consequences that the use of nuclear weapons could cause. It is on the strength of this conviction that it has never participated in any arms race, that it applies the principle of strict sufficiency and that it maintains its arsenal at the lowest possible level, compatible with the strategic context. The French deterrent is strictly defensive. Its sole aim is to protect our vital interests, in extreme circumstances of legitimate self-defence, a right that is enshrined in the United Nations Charter. The French deterrent is therefore in no way contrary to international law, as recalled by the ICJ Advisory Opinion of 8 July 1996.

Mr Chair,

Disarmament is also a collective responsibility. France has made significant unilateral gestures, but we know that unilateral gestures are not enough. The participation of all key actors is essential. So is that of the whole international community.
We have a roadmap, i.e. the Action Plan that was adopted by consensus in 2010. That roadmap lays down priorities for us.

The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) is an essential instrument which aims to act as a brake on the qualitative improvement of nuclear weapons. Its entry into force is imperative. France thus calls on all States that have not yet done so to ratify this Treaty, and welcomes in this respect the recent accession of Chad and Brunei.

France calls on all States, whether or not they are parties to the NPT, to begin negotiating a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty and in the meantime establish a moratorium on the production of these materials. This Treaty would supplement the CTBT, putting a limit to the quantitative increase of arsenals. The Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty is the priority set down by Action 15 of the Action Plan. We would have preferred to launch negotiations immediately at the Conference on Disarmament. However, we supported Resolution 67/53, tabled by Canada and adopted with a very wide majority by the UN General Assembly to advance talks on the Treaty, which will then have to be negotiated at the Conference on Disarmament. This year, we will submit a substantial contribution to the report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations. We will participate actively in the Group of Governmental Experts.

Nuclear disarmament can only be achieved step-by-step, through successive concrete and gradual gestures. This is the only effective approach; this is the approach of the 2010 Action Plan. Some recent initiatives ignore the real strategic context and skirt around concrete measures; they create parallel forums. They simply undermine the Action Plan and the NPT review process which brings us together today.

Mr Chair,

Nuclear disarmament is only meaningful if it does not lead to an arms race in other areas. This is why it needs to be carried out in the framework of general and complete disarmament, in accordance with Article VI of the NPT. In this framework, I welcome the successful conclusion of the Third Review Conference of the Chemical Weapons Convention, which is an undeniable success in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation. That Conference reiterated that the existence of chemical weapons in Syria is a serious concern for the international community.

The conclusion of the Arms Trade Treaty in March, seven years after the launch of the process, is a success for the international community. It at last regulates one of the few trades which previously remained outside the framework of multilateral agreements. It will make a valuable contribution to international security.

However, the persistent threat of proliferation crises must not be sidetracked by these positive elements. The pursuit of the Iranian nuclear programme, in violation of Security Council Resolutions, the recent North Korean nuclear test and the threats to peace on the peninsula are elements which have a negative impact on disarmament. We must act to find a solution to those proliferation crises if we really want to advance disarmament.

Thank you.