STATEMENT BY
H.E. AMBASSADOR NOZIPO MXAKATO-DISEKO
AT THE THIRD PREPARATORY COMMITTEE SESSION
FOR THE 2015 REVIEW CONFERENCE
OF THE PARTIES TO THE
TREATY ON THE NON-PROLIFERATION
OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

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Check against delivery
My delegation associates itself with the statements delivered on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and the New Agenda Coalition.

Chairperson,

It seems fitting to start the South African statement with a quote from our beloved Former President, the late Nelson Mandela when he addressed the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in 1998 and stated that “in reality, no rational answer can be advanced to explain in a satisfactory manner what, in the end, is the consequence of Cold War inertia and an attachment to the use of the threat of brute force to assert the primacy of some States over others.” He realized what all of us in this room intrinsically know: that nuclear weapons, which have the capacity to cause untold human suffering and damage for generations to come, have no place in the post-Cold War era and are useless in addressing the threats facing humanity today.

Chairperson,

The focus on the humanitarian consequences of the use of nuclear weapons is neither new in the NPT context nor is it a distraction. In fact, the first preambular paragraph of the NPT notes “the devastation that would be visited upon all mankind by a nuclear war and the consequent need to make every effort to avert the danger of such war and to take measures to safeguard the security of peoples”. While the rest of the Treaty sets out how to achieve this objective, this first paragraph clearly addresses what we set out to achieve.

It is clear that the impact of a nuclear weapon detonation, whether by accident or design, will not be limited in space and time. Beyond the immediate humanitarian disaster, there will also be wider impacts and longer-term consequences with regard to social and economic infrastructure, food security, public health and the environment. While the consequences will be widespread, it is clear that the poor and vulnerable will be the most severely affected.

For South Africa, humanitarian imperatives underpin our search for a world without the threat posed by the possession, use and proliferation of nuclear weapons. Considering the devastating effects of a nuclear weapon detonation, it is clear that due to their indiscriminate nature and uncontrollable effects, any use of nuclear weapons, under any circumstances, would constitute a violation of international law, particularly International Humanitarian Law (IHL).

Chairperson,

These considerations are today a fundamental and global concern that must be at the core of all deliberations, actions and decisions on nuclear weapons. Following the significant and growing cross-regional support for preventing the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapon detonations, as manifested during the Oslo and Nayarit Conferences, in the NPT context and at the First Committee, the challenge facing us is how to translate our resolve towards eliminating the threat posed by these weapons into concrete action -- action that should be aimed at fulfilling our collective obligations under Article VI of the NPT and the achievement and maintenance of a world without nuclear weapons.

In this review cycle, we should build on the 2010 NPT Review Conference outcome document in which “the Conference expresses its deep concern at the catastrophic humanitarian consequences
of any use of nuclear weapons and reaffirms the need for all States at all times to comply with applicable international law, including international humanitarian law”.

In achieving and maintaining a world free of nuclear weapons, the conclusion of a comprehensive convention would establish a higher norm against nuclear weapons, thereby fulfilling the NPT objectives. South Africa has also long supported a systematic and progressive approach to nuclear disarmament, including through a framework of mutually reinforcing agreements. However, for this latter approach to be credible, it has to consist of sustained, concrete progress on clearly benchmarked steps that meet the nuclear disarmament principles of transparency, irreversibility and verifiability, many of which have already been agreed, but are yet to be implemented.

Chairperson,

The Treaty remains the cornerstone of the nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation regime. The obligations under the Treaty were entered into on the basis of the historical bargain between the nuclear-weapons States and the non-nuclear-weapon States in terms of which the former undertook to eliminate their nuclear weapons based on the reciprocal undertaking by the latter not to pursue the nuclear weapons option. The NPT reaffirms the inalienable right to the peaceful use of nuclear science, technologies and applications. These three elements constitute the subject matter of this Treaty.

In 2010, States Parties united behind an extensive Action Plan under all three Treaty pillars that in a very concrete way demonstrated the continued commitment of States Parties to the NPT. The reaffirmation of the continued validity of the 1995 and 2000 outcomes, particularly the unequivocal commitment by the nuclear-weapon States to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals and the agreement to apply the principles of transparency, irreversibility and verifiability in fulfilment of Treaty obligations, provided renewed hope towards the achievement of the NPT’s overall objectives.

Chairperson,

The 2010 Action Plan aimed at accelerating the implementation of all Treaty provisions under all three Treaty pillars. South Africa looks forward to receiving the report of the nuclear-weapon States on actions they have taken to accelerate concrete progress on steps leading to nuclear disarmament as agreed during 1995, 2000 and 2010. Concrete progress on these solemn undertakings is essential to the success of the current review cycle.

We regret that beyond modest progress in the context of the New START agreement, not much concrete progress has been achieved in the area of nuclear disarmament since 2010. Reductions are indeed vital to removing the excessive destructive capabilities developed during the Cold War, but do not substitute for concrete, transparent, irreversible and verifiable nuclear disarmament measures.

The development of new categories of nuclear weapons and their delivery systems provide a clear indication that some continue to harbour aspirations for the indefinite retention of these instruments of destruction, contrary to their legal obligations and political commitments.
Pending the total elimination of nuclear weapons, which is the only guarantee that they will never be used, the provision of effective, legally-binding negative security assurances within the framework of the NPT would be a pragmatic, interim and practical measure aimed at strengthening the non-proliferation regime and contributing to the objective of a nuclear-weapon-free world.

Chairperson,

South Africa maintains its principled position that it is the obligation of States Parties to accept safeguards as required under Article III of the Treaty and urges all States that have yet to bring comprehensive safeguards agreements into force, to do so as soon as possible in order to achieve the universality of comprehensive safeguards. South Africa further reiterates its conviction that the IAEA is the only internationally recognized competent authority responsible for verifying and assuring compliance with safeguards agreements of States Parties.

Safeguards contribute to mutual confidence in the peaceful nature of a State’s nuclear activities and the absence of undeclared nuclear activities or material, which in turn would greatly facilitate the transfer of nuclear technology and use of nuclear energy to the benefit of developing countries. At the same time, it is essential that safeguards measures should not adversely affect the inalienable right to the peaceful use of nuclear energy as envisaged in Articles III and IV of the NPT. My delegation is therefore encouraged by the progress that has been made since 2010 in terms of the number of States that have now concluded Comprehensive Safeguards Agreements and Additional Protocols. We also encourage further progress in the fulfilment of the 2010 Action Plan pertaining to non-proliferation.

Chairperson,

South Africa reiterates its firm conviction that NWFZs play an important role in preventing the proliferation – both vertical and horizontal – of nuclear weapons and reaffirms its view that the establishment of internationally recognized nuclear-weapon-free zones on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at among the States of the region concerned, enhances global and regional peace and security and constitute important steps to strengthen the nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation regime.

South Africa views the 1995 resolution on the Middle East as part of the package of decisions that enabled the indefinite extension of the Treaty in 1995 and we therefore urge all States to redouble their efforts to ensure a gathering on this important issue involving all States of the region at the earliest possible date.

Chairperson,

Peaceful nuclear co-operation and access to the benefits of the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, pursuant to Article IV of the NPT, constitute one of the core objectives of the Treaty. In giving effect to Articles IV (1) and IV (2), South Africa therefore cautions against any decision that would amount to a reinterpretation of, or restriction, on this inalienable right.

Nuclear power and the peaceful applications of nuclear technology, if optimised to the fullest, can meaningfully enhance the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and could contribute to the post-2015 UN development agenda. The inalienable right of the peaceful use of nuclear
technology is of particular relevance and importance in attaining sustainable and accelerated economic growth in Africa.

South Africa attaches great importance to the IAEA’s Technical Cooperation Programme which contributes towards addressing the socio-economic needs and sustainable development challenges of developing countries. The TC Programme is also a mechanism which enables the Agency to meet its statutory objective of accelerating and enlarging the contribution of atomic energy to peace, health and prosperity throughout the world. Sufficient, assured and predictable TC funding therefore remains a priority.

Chairperson,

My delegation will add more detail regarding our positions during the cluster debates.

South Africa supports the full implementation of the NPT and its universality in pursuit of the goal of achieving a world entirely free from nuclear weapons. The strength, credibility and vitality of the NPT rest on a fundamental bargain across its three pillars, which must be recognized and upheld.

Thank you.