STATEMENT
BY
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FIRST PREPARATORY COMMITTEE FOR THE 2020 REVIEW CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE TREATY ON THE NON-PROLIFERATION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS
GENERAL DEBATE

... MAY 2017
VIENNA

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GENERAL DEBATE

Chairperson,

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

South Africa shares the deep concern expressed by the vast majority of State Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) about the catastrophic humanitarian consequences and effects of a nuclear weapon detonation, whether by accident, miscalculation or design with the devastating impact on all humanity and its environment cannot be adequately addressed. We remain convinced that nuclear weapons do not guarantee security, but rather detract from it. As long as these weapons exist, and vertical and horizontal proliferation persists, humanity will continue to face the threat of catastrophe and mass annihilation. The continued retention of nuclear weapons also serves as a catalyst for further proliferation. The recent developments around the Korean Peninsula clearly illustrates that the threat of the use of nuclear weapons is not only real, but also imminent. It is imperative that we use this Preparatory Committee as an opportunity to rededicate ourselves to all efforts aimed at eliminating the threat posed by nuclear weapons altogether. In this regard all efforts must be exerted to eliminate the spread of these horrific weapons of mass destruction.

Chairperson,

The NPT represents a historical bargain between the nuclear-weapon States and the non-nuclear-weapon States, in terms of which the former have undertaken to eliminate their nuclear weapons based on the reciprocal undertaking by the latter not to pursue the nuclear weapons option. Maintaining this bargain is central to the integrity of the Treaty if it is to remain the cornerstone of the nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation regime.

The reaffirmation of the continued validity of the outcomes of 1995 and 2000 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. The outcomes of
the 2010 NPT Review Conference, including the extensive Acton Plan under all three Treaty pillars remain valid.

However, the agreement on the 2010 Final Document fell short of meeting the expectations on the progress made in the implementation of past agreements nor did restore confidence among States Parties. In fact, most States Parties remain seriously concerned about the lack of progress in respect of nuclear disarmament. For this reason, South Africa believes that the success of 2020 will be determined by the extent to which these commitments by the NWS are being honoured.

Chairperson,

We regret that, beyond modest gains in reducing the number of strategically deployed nuclear weapons 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 ongoing modernisation programmes, including in relation to delivery systems provide a clear indication that some States continue to harbour aspirations for the indefinite retention of these instruments of destruction, contrary to their legal obligations and political commitments. This undermines the NPT bargain and perhaps more importantly the non-proliferation norms established by the Treaty.

South Africa believes that the continued reliance on nuclear weapons has led to increased insecurity among NNWS. We continue to believe that pending the total elimination of all nuclear weapons to which all States Parties have committed to, the provision of effective, unconditional, legally binding negative security assurances to the non-nuclear-weapon States under the NPT is a key element of the Treaty. The provision of such assurances is not some ultimate objective in and of itself, but is a pragmatic, interim and practical measure aimed at strengthening the non-proliferation regime and contributing the objective of a nuclear-weapon-free world.

While deeply concerned about the continuing stalemate in the Conference on Disarmament, South Africa remains committed to the soonest resumption of substantive work, including on the issues
addressed in the 2010 Action Plan pertaining to nuclear disarmament. We welcome the progress made by the UN Conference to negotiate a legally-binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons leading towards their total elimination and encourage all States to participate actively in this endeavour, consistent with their legal obligations under Article VI of the Treaty. We hope that this Conference will provide the necessary impetus to give effect to the expectations of the international community towards the achievement of a world without nuclear weapons. South Africa believes that this new instrument would complement and strengthen the NPT norms.

Chairperson,

South Africa believes that the strengthened safeguards system remains an essential element of our collective efforts to address the threat posed by the proliferation of nuclear weapons. Such strengthened safeguards would contribute to establishing confidence in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy which, in turn, would greatly facilitate the transfer of nuclear technology and use of nuclear energy to the benefit of developing countries.

South Africa therefore maintains its principled position on the obligation of States Parties to conclude Comprehensive Safeguards Agreements with the IAEA as required under the Treaty. While the Additional Protocol is a voluntary measure which does not emanate from the Treaty, South Africa nonetheless regards it as an indispensable instrument to enable the IAEA to provide credible assurances regarding the absence of undeclared nuclear material and activities in a State.

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 encourage further progress in the fulfilment of the 2010 Action Plan pertaining to non-proliferation.

Chairperson,

South Africa supports the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones in parts of the world where they do not yet exist, including in the Middle East. We share the conviction that the establishment of such zones enhances global and regional peace and security, strengthens the nuclear non-proliferation regime and contributes towards realizing the objectives of nuclear disarmament.
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. The 2010 Review Conference agreed on specific actions towards realisation of the establishment of the NWFZ in the Middle East. However, we regret the lack of progress towards realisation of these objectives. We therefore urge all States to redouble their efforts towards convening gathering Conference on this important issue involving all States of the region at the soonest possible date.

Chairperson,

The South African Government strongly condemns the nuclear tests carried out by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK). Since the announcement by the DPRK in February 2005 that it had developed a nuclear weapon deterrent capability, South Africa has consistently called on the DPRK to verifiably dismantle any nuclear weapons, to return to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) without delay, to place all its facilities under comprehensive safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and to contribute through strengthened confidence-building measures to global nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation.

South Africa welcomes the progress made towards the implementation of the JCPOA with Iran and calls on all parties involved to fulfil their obligations under the agreement.

Chairperson,

Many countries are increasingly recognising nuclear energy as a viable, reliable and clean option to meet their growing energy demands In this context, South Africa is working towards an energy sector that promotes economic growth and sustainable development, hence nuclear energy has been identified (under the 2010 Integrated Resource Plan) as part of our energy mix to address energy security in the country.

Chairperson,

Article IV of the Treaty guarantees an inalienable right of all the State Parties to develop, research, produce and use nuclear energy without discrimination and in conformity with Articles I and II of the Treaty. This Article is of particular relevance and importance to Africa, given the need
for adequate energy supplies to fuel sustainable and accelerated economic growth on our Continent.

South Africa’s approach to nuclear energy is premised on the fact that peaceful nuclear co-operation and access to the benefits of nuclear energy, pursuant to this Article are integral components of the Treaty. We also derive benefits from applications of nuclear techniques to health, nutrition and agriculture. In addition, South Africa’s international legally binding obligations on nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation allow for the enrichment of uranium for peaceful purposes.

South Africa recognizes the growing role that the IAEA will have to play in the future. Many of the IAEA’s TC projects are of strategic importance to developing countries, particularly in Africa, in contributing towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Chairperson,

In conclusion, South Africa reiterates its support for the full implementation of the NPT and its universality in pursuit of our common 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.