Mr. President,

First of all, I align myself with the statement by the European Union.

Over the past years, and in particular since the last Review Conference in 2015, most of the countries members to the United Nations have been engaged in long and often controversial debates about how to make better progress in nuclear disarmament. Inspired and guided by the overall goal of “global zero”, of a world without nuclear weapons, no effort was spared to search for common ground on how to best advance nuclear disarmament, including in the Open-ended Working Group on Nuclear Disarmament which met in
Geneva in 2016 and in the last UN General Assembly’s First Committee. Germany entirely shares the vision of a nuclear free world and is actively engaged in promoting the nuclear disarmament process. Consequently, Germany actively participated in the three Conferences on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons in Norway, Mexico and Austria in 2013 and 2014 and in the work of the Open-ended Working Group in Geneva last year.

Our collective efforts towards nuclear disarmament entered a new phase when negotiations of a nuclear weapons’ prohibition treaty began in March in New York. We take note of the desire of the countries involved in these negotiations to accelerate progress towards nuclear disarmament. However, as much as the approach of a nuclear weapons’ ban seems to be a tempting short-cut, Germany is convinced that such a path cannot bring us any inch closer to concrete nuclear disarmament. Germany’s concern with commencing negotiations on a treaty to legally ban nuclear weapons is not only that a nuclear ban treaty without the involvement of nuclear weapon states will be ineffective, but also that it does not provide for verification mechanisms needed to monitor
that nuclear disarmament measures would indeed be fully implemented in an irreversible manner.

In seeking ways forward towards nuclear disarmament, there is no alternative to ensuring that nuclear weapon states are engaged in the process and acknowledging that real progress can only be made if and when the international security environment is right.

Another central concern remains the full effectiveness of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) in its three pillars one of which is nuclear disarmament. An immediate "ban" of nuclear weapons without verification mechanisms or restrictions on the production of fissile material bears the risk of weakening the NPT also with regard to its other pillars – contrary to the intention of its proponents.

For these reasons, Germany has decided to stay away from the negotiations on a legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons. As we stated in the General Debate, Germany remains convinced that a progressive step-by-step
approach based on the 2010-Action Plan remains the only realistic and valid roadmap to nuclear disarmament aimed at achieving concrete results.

Our progressive step-by-step approach has identified concrete ways aiming for conditions that would allow for the continuous reduction of nuclear weapons by establishing the confidence and trust needed for such steps. It focuses on strengthening the NPT as the central cornerstone of the international nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament architecture. Implementation of many of the elements of the Action Plan agreed at the 2010 NPT Review Conference will be key to making real and substantive progress towards nuclear disarmament, including:

- Early progress on restricting the production of fissile material is a shared priority of the international community. That’s why Germany, together with Canada and the Netherlands, co-sponsored a General Assembly resolution launching a new process of diplomatic efforts towards an FMCT, setting out a high-level FMCT expert preparatory group in Geneva which will start its work in
July. Thereby, we aim to move forward despite the long stalemate in the CD in Geneva. We feel reassured about our approach by the substantive discussions on the issue which took place in New York in March and would like to encourage all countries to follow the discussions closely. The co-sponsors stand ready to facilitate a continuous and transparent flow of information on the issue.

- It is highly regrettable that the CTBT has not yet entered into force in spite of the overwhelming support lent to this goal by both the 2000 and 2010 Review Conferences. The entry into force of the CTBT would be in the security interest of all states. In the 21st century, there is no place for nuclear testing! Germany welcomes the fact that the International Monitoring System has already proven its effectiveness by detecting nuclear tests. States Signatories must increase the political will and provide adequate resources to complete the verification regime. Germany is proud of being the third largest contributor to the important work of the CTBTO.
• Another important element of the step-by-step approach is the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification (IPNDV). IPNDV is aimed at making progress towards a robust and credible verification mechanism as an essential element on the way towards a world without nuclear weapons. Germany hosted the last IPNDV working group meeting in Berlin from 6-8 March 2017.

• Germany is also actively engaged in the Non-proliferation and Disarmament Initiative (NPDI) whose “signature approach” is to strengthen the NPT based on the 2010 Action Plan and its multiple proposals to advance implementation of the NPT.

It needs to be stressed that more progress towards nuclear disarmament does not only imply the need for multilateral disarmament steps, but first and foremost bold steps by those nuclear weapons states which hold the biggest nuclear arsenals. Assessments diverge on how much progress has been achieved: While we welcome the steps that have already been taken, in particular the substantial reductions of the global stockpiles of nuclear warheads in the years since
the 2010 Review Conference, there are still too many nuclear weapons. Much more can be done to increase transparency of the remaining nuclear arsenals. We call upon the United States of America and the Russian Federation to renew and continue their bilateral efforts to constructively engage with each other in new disarmament talks in order to achieve further reductions, including talks about the future of the New START treaty. After all, this is precisely what is required under Article VI of the NPT according to the reading of this article by the International Court of Justice in its 1996 Advisory Opinion.

With good reason, the 2010-Action Plan laid emphasis on transparency. Under the Action Plan, reporting is an obligation incumbent on all NPT Member States. However, it is hard to deny that there is a particular responsibility of the P5 to report, without prejudice to national security, on their stocks. In the absence of concrete numbers, it is almost impossible to ascertain whether headway is being made or to confirm that nuclear stockpiles are not expanding. This Conference should thus reiterate the crucial importance of
transparency. The Standard Reporting Forms developed by the NPDI should be revisited in that regard.

As Sam Nunn, William Perry, Henry Kissinger and George Shultz put it succinctly: “A world without nuclear weapons will not simply be today's world minus nuclear weapons.” In other words, effective and verifiable nuclear disarmament does not take place in a vacuum, but in a concrete security and political context. For the time being, nuclear weapons are still being assigned a role in military doctrines. This also applies to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, of which Germany is a member.

The 2010 NPT Action Plan is also based on a gradual approach. In its Action 5, it lists important steps which should be taken, such as a further reduction of the role of nuclear weapons in military doctrines or the issue of de-alerting. All of these measures presuppose trust between partners and a cooperative setting based on reciprocity. After the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia and in the course of the Ukraine crisis, a lot of trust has been lost. This is also true
with regard to the so-called Negative Security Assurances, which suffered a heavy blow after the breach of the Budapest Memorandum, which guaranteed the territorial integrity of Ukraine. In the present, difficult context, it is also of paramount importance that disarmament and non-proliferation commitments under existing treaties are honoured and preserved, including the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, which is a crucial element of Euro-Atlantic security.

In closing, let me say a word on how we can jointly make progress on nuclear disarmament in this Review Cycle despite our differences on the need and usefulness of a nuclear weapons prohibition. Regardless of our individual perspectives on this Preparatory Committee, I would hope that we are united by the goal of making this Review Cycle a successful one for nuclear disarmament based on the many ideas and suggestions of the 2010 Action Plan. Needless to say that Germany is also open to discuss ideas how to supplement it and to update it where necessary.