STATEMENT
BY THE

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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

CLUSTER 1 ISSUES

... MAY 2017
VIENNA

Check against delivery
Chairperson,

South Africa associates itself with the statements delivered on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and the New Agenda Coalition. To this, I add a few additional remarks in my national capacity.

Chairperson,

My delegation would like to start by reiterating South Africa’s commitment to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and its three equally important pillars, namely, nuclear disarmament, nuclear non-proliferation and the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. We believe that nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation are mutually reinforcing processes and therefore progress in both elements is essential to realise the object and purpose of the NPT. In this regard, we would like to express our concern on the lack of significant progress on nuclear disarmament.

Chairperson,

In South Africa’s view, the existence of nuclear weapons poses a serious threat to humanity. The only way to eliminate the threat posed by nuclear weapons is to completely eliminate all nuclear weapons as envisaged under the NPT’s grand bargain. Article VI makes it clear that nuclear disarmament is an obligation of all States Parties. It is therefore an obligatory and shared responsibility of all States to prevent any use of nuclear weapons, to curb their proliferation and to achieve nuclear disarmament. South Africa believes that the only guarantee against the use or threat of use posed by nuclear weapons is their total elimination and legally binding assurances that they will never be produced again.

Chairperson,

South Africa has consistently and strongly condemned the nuclear tests carried out by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) and its provocative actions...
which only add to the escalation of tensions in the Korean Peninsula. We continue to strongly call upon the DPRK to cease its unacceptable actions by verifiably dismantling any nuclear weapons, return to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) without delay, comply with its legally binding comprehensive safeguards obligations under the IAEA. Moreover, we urge the DPRK to return to the Six Party Talks and to refrain from any actions that could further complicate the volatile political and security situation in the Korean Peninsula.

Chairperson,

South Africa also believes that the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones constitutes an important disarmament and non-proliferation measure. South Africa supports the establishment of new zones, including in the Middle East, but also other regions such as Europe. We urge States that are still to ratify nuclear-weapon-free zones Treaties to do so without further delay. We also urge all nuclear-weapon States that have signed or ratified any of the relevant protocols of the nuclear-weapon-free zones treaties and that did so with reservations or unilateral interpretations affecting the status of the denuclearized zone, to modify or withdraw any reservations or unilateral interpretations not consistent with the object and purpose of such treaties.

Chairperson,

Beyond the Article VI obligations, there is no more compelling reason for the pursuit of nuclear disarmament than the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons. Concerns about the catastrophic humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons have been with us since the first use of these weapons. These concerns were the motivating factor for the establishment of the NPT and they remain a motivating factor in insisting that its provisions are fully implemented.

For South Africa, it is important that we recall the outcomes of the Oslo, Nayarit and Vienna International Conferences on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons.
Chairperson,

It is inconceivable that the use of Nuclear Weapons could ever, under any circumstances, be consistent with international law, particularly international humanitarian law.

Chairperson,

We welcome the steps taken under the New START agreement between the Russian Federation and the United States to reduce operationally deployed strategic nuclear weapons. In this context, we recall the commitment made in the 2010 Action Plan to continue work on achieving deeper reductions. It is important that such cuts should address all nuclear weapons, irrespective of their type or location. While these reductions are undoubtedly vital to removing the excessive destructive capabilities developed during the Cold War, they 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 of the NWS continue to harbour aspirations for the indefinite retention of these instruments of destruction, contrary to their legal obligations and commitments. It is regrettable that vast public resources are diverted towards the modernization of nuclear weapons. Much-needed resources could be redirected towards development assistance, including the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Chairperson,

My delegation would like to reiterate its deep concern about the continuing stalemate in the Conference on Disarmament that undermines its credibility and raises questions about its continued relevance. We remain committed to the soonest resumption of substantive work, including through the establishment of subsidiary bodies that would deal with nuclear disarmament and commence negotiations on a
fissile material treaty that would serve both disarmament and non-proliferation objectives, as agreed to in the 2010 Action Plan.

Chairperson,

The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) is an important element of the set of mutually-reinforcing instruments aimed at accomplishing our common goals of nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation and we look forward to its early entry into force.

Chairperson,

In conclusion,

South Africa welcomes the start of the UN process to negotiate a legally-binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons, leading towards their total elimination. We view this prohibition instrument as a positive step towards the strengthening of the nuclear disarmament pillar of the NPT. We are encouraged with progress achieved during the first UN Conference held in New York in March 2017, which we believe will provide the necessary impetus to give effect to the expectations of the international community towards the achievement of a world without nuclear weapons. In this regard, South Africa continues to encourage all Member States to participate in this important process.

I thank you, Chairperson.