



PERMANENT MISSION OF NIGERIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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STATEMENT

BY

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AT THE

**GENERAL DEBATE OF THE FIRST COMMITTEE OF THE
58TH UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY SESSION**

NEW YORK, 6 OCTOBER 2003

Mr Chairman,

The Nigerian delegation offers warm congratulations to you on your election as Chairman of the First Committee of the 58th Session of the General Assembly. We are confident that you will provide the requisite leadership to steer our work to a successful conclusion. Let me also, through you, congratulate other members of the Bureau on their election. I wish to assure you and the Bureau of the full cooperation of my delegation.

We would also like to thank the Under Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs, Mr. Nobuyasu Abe, for his introductory statement which contains very useful information and guide for our work.

Mr Chairman,

This meeting is holding at a time when the international community is faced with increasing divergent views on how best to address the issues of arms control and disarmament. The direct effect of this growing disagreement has been lack of progress in the area of disarmament. This unfortunate situation has been complicated by recent developments in the international political scene which have, regrettably, rendered the prospects of accelerating progress in the field of disarmament even more remote. Sadly enough, the entire scenario is being played in an international environment already characterized by increased acquisition of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, widespread accumulation and use of illicit small arms and light weapons and threat of international terrorism. The consequences of these rather sad developments are now felt throughout the world. We have now become witnesses to the fast erosion of the optimism generated in the international community by the successful conclusion during the last decade of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty and the Ottawa Convention on Anti-Personnel Landmines.

We must acknowledge that there are strong reasons for the loss of faith by the international community in disarmament process. As we all know, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) has not entered into force due to the failure of some Member States to ratify it, in particular those States whose ratification is mandatory for its entry into force; the negotiations to conclude a compliance mechanism for biological weapons convention remain inconclusive; the Chemical Weapons Convention still lacks the much-needed universality; while the Conference on Disarmament, the only single multilateral negotiating forum on disarmament has continued to fail to make progress on substantive issues before it. Similarly, the Disarmament Commission this year failed for the first time to live up to expectation as a specialised

deliberative body within the United Nations multilateral disarmament machinery that makes concrete recommendations on specific issues in the field of disarmament. This year also witnessed the failure by Member States to achieve consensus on the objectives and agenda for the Fourth Special Session of the General Assembly Devoted to Disarmament leading to the collapse of the Working Group set up for that purpose.

Mr. Chairman

Nigerian delegation believes that nuclear weapons pose the greatest danger to mankind. The most effective means of achieving nuclear disarmament should, therefore, be the commencement of multilateral negotiations leading to an early conclusion of a convention on the total elimination of nuclear weapons. As a first step towards the realization of this objective, nuclear-weapon States should make a commitment to immediately stop the qualitative improvement, development, production and stockpiling of nuclear warheads and their delivery systems. In this regard, we emphasise the importance of ensuring that any nuclear disarmament process should be irreversible, transparent, and verifiable. My delegation also wishes to stress that the presumption of indefinite possession of nuclear weapons by some countries cannot be compatible with sustaining the non-proliferation regime and the goal of maintaining international peace and security. It is, therefore, our belief that unless the major powers show sufficient flexibility and practical commitment to nuclear disarmament, the overall disarmament process will continue to be paralysed.

The Nigerian delegation reaffirms its belief in the Treaty on Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons as a vital instrument in the maintenance of international peace and security. The delegation further endorses the Final Document of the 2000 NPT Review Conference containing practical steps for the systematic and progressive efforts to implement Article VI of the Treaty including the unequivocal commitment undertaken by the nuclear-weapon States to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals leading to nuclear disarmament.

Nuclear-weapon-free zones play important role in the maintenance of regional peace and security. For this reason, my delegation wishes to underline the need for consolidating the existing nuclear-weapon-free zones and the establishment of new ones on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at among the States of the region concerned. In this regard, we express our concern that the Treaty of Pelindaba is yet to enter into force seven years after it was opened for signature. The Nigerian delegation, therefore, calls for early ratification of the Treaty by States signatories to it, to ensure its entry into force as soon as possible.

Mr Chairman,

The existence of broad structure of disarmament and arms control agreements is a direct result of non-discriminatory multilateral negotiations. The ultimate goal of general and complete disarmament can only be achieved on the basis of universal, multilateral and non-discriminatory negotiations. Multilateral diplomacy, therefore, remains the surest path to achieve international cooperation and make progress in the field of disarmament and arms control. In recognition of this fact, the Nigerian delegation wishes to reaffirm its absolute commitment to the promotion of multilateralism in the field of disarmament as an essential way to strengthen international peace and security and further calls on all Member States to show similar commitment to the principle of multilateralism in addressing issues of common interest.

Mr Chairman,

The Nigerian delegation is deeply concerned about the problem of illicit trade in small arms and light weapons because it constitutes a major impediment to peace, stability, security and economic development of many developing countries especially in Africa. As we are all aware, these arms continue to have devastating effects on the African continent considering their capacity to fuel and prolong conflicts. You are, no doubt, aware of the millions of lives lost as well as the humanitarian crisis created in the region as a result of their illicit use. In recognition of this unfortunate situation, my delegation wishes to reiterate President Olusegun Obasanjo's call on the international community at the General Debate two weeks ago to conclude negotiations on a legally binding international instrument to regulate the supply of such weapons to non-State actors.

While reaffirming our commitment to the obligations undertaken in the Programme of Action of the 2001 UN Conference on small arms, the Nigerian delegation welcomes the outcome of the First Biennial Meeting of States on Small Arms and Light Weapons which took place in New York last July, and looks forward with hope to the next Biennial Meeting in 2005 as well as the Review Conference the year after. We note with satisfaction that the Group of Experts set up by the Secretary-General to study the feasibility of developing an international instrument on marking and tracing small arms and light weapons has successfully completed its work. My delegation wishes to take this opportunity to thank the Secretary-General for giving Nigeria the opportunity of serving in the Group of Experts.

Mr. Chairman

Nigeria has taken note of the success achieved by the world community in the fight against land mines since the entry into force of the 1999 Ottawa Convention on Anti-Personnel Landmines. In this connection, my delegation welcomes the successful conclusion of the Fifth Meeting of the State Parties to the Convention in Bangkok last month just as we acknowledge the positive role that the civil society, in particular the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) has continued to play in this important area. We regret to note, however, that in spite of the success achieved so far by the international community in dealing with the problem, landmines continue to claim victims on the African continent. In many post conflict situations in Africa, these mines result in horrific human suffering and hamper economic development and national reconstruction. Nigeria underlines the crucial importance of providing international assistance to mine-affected States in clearing anti-personnel mines placed on their territories, and for care and rehabilitation, including social and economic integration of mine victims. It is also our belief that the international community should give urgent attention to the need to curb the indiscriminate use of these mines in various regions of the world. We also urge all States that have signed but not ratified the Convention to ratify it as soon as possible.

Mr. Chairman,

Ten days ago, 26th September 2003, Nigeria successfully launched its first National Satellite into orbit at the space centre in Plestek, Russian Federation. The satellite will assist in gathering data for seismic and soil studies, meteorological information, surveillance on oil pipelines and monitoring of the air space. The launching of the satellite is a demonstration of Nigeria's strong belief and commitment to the principle of exploration and use of the outer space for peaceful purposes for the benefit of mankind. We believe as most countries do, in the constructive application of the vast, almost limitless, resources of nature to human needs. In order to guarantee the greatest benefit of the outer space to the people of all nations, the international community owes a responsibility to future generation of mankind in ensuring the prevention of arms race in the outer space. We therefore, urge all Member States to continue to commit themselves to the preservation of the outer space for peaceful purposes only.

I thank you.