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TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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**STATEMENT  
BY  
SOUTH AFRICA**

**ON THE  
GENERAL DEBATE  
OF THE  
FIRST COMMITTEE  
OF THE 58<sup>TH</sup> SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS  
GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

**NEW YORK  
06 OCTOBER 2003**

**Check against delivery**

Mr. Chairperson,

Let me extend my delegation's congratulations on your assumption of the chair of the First Committee for the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly. I wish to assure you of my delegation's full support and co-operation as you and the bureau lead the work of this Committee to a successful conclusion.

Mr. Chairperson,

The tragic bombing of the UN Headquarters in Iraq on 19 August 2003 jolted the world and brought the cruel face of terrorism right to the doorsteps of this building. Terrorists, could and probably would, use any means, however barbaric or horrendous, to achieve their ends. This raises the spectre of the possible use of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons. Dozens of media reports revisited many of the threats that had haunted us previously - dirty bombs, mini nukes, backyard bio-labs, etc - and pointed out how new technologies, freer trade and open borders provided easy exploitation by those seeking to wreak havoc. Public statements espoused the urgent need to prevent these weapons from being used.

Mr. Chairperson,

Since we met a year ago the issue of disarmament and non-proliferation has become an area of much greater international attention. The threat, as perceived and presented, of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery, resulted in war. The end of the Cold War and the ensuing winds of hope, peace and progress had lulled us into complacency. We believed that the threat of days gone past had dissipated. Old nuclear and other rivalries had been overtaken by new friendships and relationships, co-operation, understanding and peace.

Mr. Chairperson,

Scenarios of the possible consequences of the use of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction are indeed frightening. Every August brings to the fore those horrific events at Hiroshima and Nagasaki 58 years ago. Our wildest imagination would not be able to envisage what human suffering and devastation modern thermonuclear devices -- weapons more than a thousand times more potent than the 1945 devices -- could wreak on an urban population. Today this horror even continues to threaten States and peoples that have bound themselves not to aspire to nuclear weapons, but who are unable to obtain reliable assurances that these weapons will not be used, or be threatened to be used, against them.

We are also regularly confronted with stark insights into the possible consequences of biological agents being released into the environment - even if this is unintentional and despite all controls. Ordinary people around the world are repulsed by those images and naturally experience anxiety and fear that such calamity may befall them.

Mr. Chairperson,

Every year this Committee meets to address these very issues of disarmament that ordinary people around the world are deeply concerned and anxious about. We carry the responsibility of collectively allaying their fears and have the duty to do our utmost to adequately address the issues in front of us.

We would urge that all members approach our work in a serious fashion and that we work together so that we can agree collectively to actions that will contribute to and promote international peace and security.

We are faced with a plethora of resolutions. Many of them are repetitive, consume most of our valuable time and do not add anything new to the agenda. Years of bureaucratic creativity have produced a proliferation of resolutions on a wide-ranging number of topics. We agree that all issues are important, but we do need to prioritise. We need to get back to basics and ensure that the bulk of our time and deliberation in this Committee is spent on issues that could move international security forward on the basis of a consensus between ourselves, or which provide a genuine platform of debate on actions for the future. The challenge is to achieve action orientated resolutions that draw the support of all of us or which provide the platform for work in the future, and which should be implemented when they are adopted.

We would urge you, Mr Chairperson, to consult with main sponsors of resolutions on similar issues to discuss whether it would be possible to merge them into consolidated resolutions. We would also like to suggest that the main sponsors of resolutions that do not reflect significant changes during the year consider tabling their resolutions every second or third year, or as appropriate. The aim should be to allow us sufficient time to focus on, and give the needed substantive consideration to, the issues that we need to address.

Mr. Chairperson,

Our record of achievement on some of the most crucial issues is distressing:

- Global military expenditure is expected to rise over one trillion dollars this year, while half the world languishes in chronic poverty and deprivation.
- There has been no progress on real nuclear disarmament. On the contrary these weapons seem to be regaining their allure. The Nuclear Weapon States cling to their arsenals, are devising new rationales for their use and are reported to be further exploring the development of new types of devices. More states are working to emulate them, while terrorists are swayed by their rationale for having them. The concept of a second nuclear era, which seeks to return a lost claim to legitimacy, should be opposed with all our endeavors.
- The Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty has been crippled by the lack of commitment of some signatory states.
- The Conference on Disarmament, which is not only funded through the contributions of its Members, but the contributions of each and every one of the Member States of the United Nations, has not done any substantive work for seven years. Its inactivity, which is shrouded in its report to this Committee, has prevented the negotiation of a nuclear fissile materials treaty, despite agreement by this Committee for the negotiations to proceed, and has prevented work on other priority issues such as nuclear disarmament, which had also been agreed to.
- We have not addressed the possible weaponisation of space, although we all concede that this is the next battleground and that prevention is better than cure.
- We have not been able to adequately address the Biological Weapons Convention by strengthening its implementation, although we toiled collectively through many years of negotiation to do so.
- We have not managed to collectively address the proliferation of missiles, especially those capable of delivering weapons of mass destruction.

These are a few of the most vexing issues we should collectively be seeking action on.

Mr. Chairperson,

We are half-way through the period between the 2000 Review Conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the 2005 Review Conference. We have concluded two preparatory committee sessions where the outcome was determined by a chairperson's summary. We have

deliberated upon many important issues in the first two sessions and, in accordance with the decision on "Improving the effectiveness of the strengthened review process for the NPT", will at the third, and as appropriate, fourth session, taking into account the deliberations and results of its previous sessions, make every effort to produce a consensus report containing recommendations to the Review Conference. This will demand a concerted effort from all States parties to produce substantive recommendations in accordance with the obligations we all agreed to in 2000.

South Africa, along with its partners in the New Agenda, will be tabling two resolutions entitled "Towards a nuclear weapon free world: a new agenda" and "Reductions of non-strategic nuclear weapons". While the operative language in the resolution on the "reductions of non-strategic nuclear weapons" is substantively the same as that in the "Towards a nuclear weapon free world: a new agenda" resolution, the separate resolution is being presented to enhance our view that the further reduction of non-strategic nuclear weapons should be accorded a higher priority, as an important step towards the elimination of nuclear weapons, and be carried out in a comprehensive manner. As elaborated by the distinguished representative of Brazil, these resolutions also build on the previous resolutions and take into account developments in the last year. We have been very grateful for the wide support these resolutions have attracted previously and trust that we can again count on Member States and civil society to continue working with us to achieve a nuclear weapon free world.

Mr. Chairperson,

It is with deep disappointment and regret that we see yet another year at the Conference on Disarmament end with no substantive work being undertaken. Recent developments at the CD do, however, hold out the hope that we may have the best opportunity so far to overcome the deadlock. In this regard we commend the work by the group of Five Ambassadors and the flexibility shown by Members of the CD, particularly China and the Russian Federation, to join a consensus on the proposal put forward by the Five Ambassadors. South Africa calls upon those who are still considering this proposal to recognise that within our grasp we have the most realistic chance for getting down to substantive negotiation. We would encourage the current and forthcoming Presidents of the CD to vigorously pursue their consultations on the basis of this proposal so as to provide the foundation for the CD to commence substantive work at the beginning of its 2004 session.

In the area of biological weapons, South Africa remains disappointed that the States parties were unable to conclude their work on strengthening the implementation of the Biological Weapons Convention (BTWC). We remain

convinced that the dangers of biological weapons and increasing threats will lead us back to the common understanding that legal measures negotiated in the context of the Convention far surpass any ad hoc or non-binding solutions. While the substantive contribution to international peace and security of the new work that is being undertaken in terms of the decision agreed to at the BTWC's Review Conference remains an open question, we are satisfied that the process reflects a commitment to a multilateral approach.

South Africa welcomes the outcome of the First Review Conference of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the high level of commitment displayed in the adoption by the States parties in the Political Declaration. We look forward to the meeting of States parties later this month and the development of a Plan of Action on national implementation measures as agreed under Agenda item 7 (c) (v) of the outcome of the Review Conference. South Africa will work diligently with all delegations to ensure that the Plan of Action identifies the problems and constraints being experienced by some States parties and offers focused, necessary technical support and assistance in order for them to meet the provisions of Article VII of the Convention.

Mr. Chairperson,

The successful conclusion of the recently held United Nations First Biennial Meeting of States to consider the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in all its aspects is a testimony to the commitment by Member States and the non-governmental community to implement and facilitate the implementation of the 2001 Programme of Action (PoA). South Africa wishes to commend the chairperson of the First Biennial meeting, Ambassador Inoguchi of Japan, for her dedication and leadership that greatly contributed to the success of the meeting.

South Africa welcomes the report of the Group of Governmental Experts on the tracing of illicit small arms and light weapons and believes that the General Assembly should act upon the recommendation of the Group to launch negotiations on an international instrument to enable States to identify and trace, in a timely and reliable manner, illicit small arms and light weapons. South Africa recognises and highly appreciates the crucial role played by the Chairperson of the Group of Governmental Experts, Ambassador Rakesh Sood of India, in leading the Group to adopt a consensus report.

The International Action Network on Small Arms has recently commented that the progress made towards the implementation of the Programme of Action can at best only be described as modestly positive. Against the

background of this sobering assessment, South Africa, Colombia and Japan will again submit a draft resolution on "The Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in all its aspects". The resolution will, if adopted, recognise the outcome of the First Biennial meeting, act upon the recommendations of the Group of Governmental Experts, set the date and venue for the 2006 Review Conference of the PoA and guide further work on the important issue of brokering. Through the decisions proposed in the resolution we will, under the auspices of the United Nations, intensify our collective efforts to prevent, combat and eradicate the scourge of illicit small arms and light weapons.

Mr. Chairperson,

South Africa wishes to congratulate Thailand on their successful hosting of the Fifth Meeting of States parties to the Mine Ban Treaty. The outcome of the meeting in Bangkok has laid a solid foundation for our continued efforts in ridding the world of anti-personnel mines and in preparing for the important first Review Conference of the Treaty. South Africa highly appreciates the generous and fitting offer of the Government of Kenya to present Nairobi as the venue for this Review Conference, which was accepted by the meeting of States parties in Bangkok. South Africa welcomes the nomination of Ambassador Wolfgang Petritsch of Austria as the President of the First Review Conference and wishes to assure him of South Africa's full support and co-operation in the challenging task that lies ahead of him.

In Africa major peace initiatives have been launched to resolve conflict situations. The use of anti-personnel mines has a debilitating impact on these societies, even in the periods after the conflicts have been resolved. The legacy that the use of anti-personnel mines leaves behind is a legacy of shame, where innocent woman, children and other civilians fall victim to these weapons, even as they try to re-establish their lives. It is as if these innocents are forced to face a second war with anti-personnel mines, even after the conflict itself has been resolved.

The Review Conference will be held in 2004 during the period that coincides with the seventh anniversary of the signing of this global norm against anti-personnel mines. This provides us with the ideal opportunity not only to critically evaluate our achievements, but also to intensify our efforts to mobilise resources to clear mined areas and assist those who have become victims of this deadly weapon. Thereby, we will set out an agenda that would rapidly lead us to a world free of anti-personnel mines.

The decisions of the Second Review Conference of the Certain Conventional Weapons Convention (CCW) that established an intensive programme of work undertaken by the Group of Governmental Experts, has culminated in a draft proposal for a legally binding instrument on explosive remnants of war. South Africa is disappointed that a stronger instrument could not be negotiated, especially with regard to victim assistance. However, we believe that the draft instrument should be fine-tuned at the final session of the Group of Governmental Experts and should be adopted as an additional Protocol to the CCW by the Meeting of States parties in November 2003.

My delegation has noted the consensus report of the 2003 Group of Governmental Experts on the continuing operation and further development of the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms that met in New York this year. We note that the most significant recommendations, from the perspective of the development of the Register, were that technical adjustments be made to two of the seven Categories of conventional arms covered by the Register; namely, to lower the reporting threshold for large-calibre artillery systems from 100 to 75 millimetres and that Man-Portable Air-Defence Systems (MANPADS) should be included in Category VII entitled "Missiles and Missile Launchers". South Africa strongly supports the development of the Register and would hope that the Group's recommendations will be adopted by consensus.

Mr. Chairperson,

We have tried both in the First Committee and the UN Disarmament Commission to address the convening of a Fourth Special Session devoted to Disarmament for the last few years. This emphasis by the overwhelming majority of states reflects the importance that is attached to this issue. The failure of the open-ended working group to thus far agree on the objectives and agenda for the special session is disappointing. The entire disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control scenario has changed dramatically since the 1978 consensus reached at SSODI. These changes need to be reviewed and taken into account along with the disarmament machinery which is now outdated and in serious need of an overhaul. South Africa is hopeful that Member States will, with more effort, manage to narrow differences and move forward on the outstanding issues that will enable convening SSODIV.

Mr. Chairperson,

South Africa remains committed to the work of this Committee and of all other disarmament and non-proliferation fora, so as to achieve the total elimination of all weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems, and to limiting the numbers of

conventional weapons to the minimum required for self-defence. While the lack of progress in disarmament is deeply disappointing and a matter of serious concern, South Africa continues to recognise the critical importance of the issues we deal with for international peace and security -- not only in our time, but also for generations to come. South Africa therefore remains determined to continue to work, singly or in co-operation with other like-minded countries, for the achievement of our collective goals.

Mr. Chairperson, I thank you.