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STATEMENT

BY

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**DURING THE FIRST COMMITTEE
GENERAL DEBATE**

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Thank you, Madam Chairperson,

My delegation wishes to congratulate you on your election to preside over the work of the 2006 First Committee. I also wish to fully associate myself with the general debate statements delivered on behalf of the New Agenda Coalition, the Non-Aligned Movement and the African Group.

Madam Chairperson,

This meeting of the First Committee comes at a time when the international disarmament and non-proliferation regime continues to face a number of challenges. It takes place against the backdrop of the lack of any substantive outcome at the 2005 Review Conference of States Party to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), as well as the inability of last year's General Assembly High Level Summit to reach agreement on matters relating to nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation. The continued failure of the Conference on Disarmament to reach agreement on a Programme of Work underscores these challenges, as does the decade-long delay in the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. The recent outcome – or rather the lack of it – of the Conference to Review Implementation of the UN Programme of Action on small arms and light weapons may be added to this growing list of setbacks.

Furthermore, during the last few years we have witnessed an increasing trend to focus almost exclusively on the non-proliferation provisions of the relevant internationally legally-binding instruments, especially those relating to weapons of mass destruction. Whilst South Africa remains fully committed to the continuous review and strengthening of measures aimed at preventing the proliferation of all weapons of mass destruction, we believe that real progress in securing our world from the threat of these weapons can only be achieved through concomitant progress in the area of disarmament.

Madam, Chairperson,

With specific reference to nuclear weapons, South Africa was honoured to preside over the 50th Regular Session of the General Conference of the IAEA in Vienna last month. The 50th Anniversary in 2007 of the establishment of the IAEA marks a significant point in the history of this important institution. South Africa remains fully committed to its objectives as set out in Article II of the IAEA's Statute, with a view to further the development and applications of nuclear technology towards peace, health and prosperity. My delegation can only encourage the IAEA to face, with new resolve, the current challenges facing the nuclear disarmament and the nuclear non-proliferation regime.

Madam Chairperson,

As a country that has foregone the nuclear weapons option, democratic South Africa has always believed that nuclear weapons have no role in today's world security order. We

therefore call on all Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) to fulfill and implement each and every obligation under the Treaty, as the success of the Treaty depends on the fulfillment of all of its objectives. Equally important is the full implementation of the decisions and resolution of the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference and the practical steps for systematic and progressive efforts to achieve nuclear disarmament that were agreed upon at the 2000 NPT Review Conference. In order for efforts to eliminate nuclear weapons proliferation to be sustainable, equal efforts must be made to eliminate the nuclear weapons themselves.

Madam Chairperson,

There is growing unease that while demands are being made for non-nuclear-weapon States to agree to new measures aimed at non-proliferation, concrete and equivalent actions towards nuclear disarmament are neglected. In this regard, my country views the three pillars of the NPT, namely nuclear disarmament, nuclear non-proliferation and the peaceful uses of nuclear energy as indispensable for the maintenance of the equilibrium of the global security regime, for without each of these pillars, the treaty would not have come into being.

South Africa wishes to reiterate that it does not support unwarranted restrictions on the NPT's guaranteed access to nuclear capabilities for peaceful purposes by States that are fully compliant with all their obligations under the Treaty. The imposition of additional restrictive measures on some NPT States Parties while allowing others to have access to these capabilities, can only serve to exacerbate existing inequalities that are already inherent in the NPT and to undermine one of the central bargains contained in the Treaty.

We are therefore concerned that proposals are being made, not least those related to the use of sensitive material and technologies, which may infringe on the inalienable right of all countries to the peaceful uses of such technologies, consistent with their Treaty obligations. We should guard against the subjective notion that such sensitive material and technologies are safe in the hands of some States, but pose a risk when others have access to them. A determination as to whether these sensitive material and technologies are safe in the hands of certain States can only be made on the basis of whether they are indeed intended for use or are already being used in the development of weapons of mass destruction. In this regard, the relevant international institutions responsible for verifying that such materials and technologies are not diverted to non-peaceful activities, including the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), continue to play a central role in providing the necessary assurances.

On another matter, Madam Chairperson, my delegation remains concerned at the continued failure of the Conference on Disarmament to agree on a Programme of Work and to commence substantive negotiations on disarmament issues. Nevertheless, we have been somewhat encouraged by the more constructive and focused deliberations that have taken place at the Conference this year. South Africa is honoured to assume the CD Presidency in 2007. As the first President for next year's CD session, we will, with the

cooperation and support by all States Parties, exert all possible efforts and examine all options to try and resolve the deadlock that has existed in the Conference for far too long. In this regard, I may mention that my delegation intends to conduct consultations with CD Members on the way forward during the margins of this First Committee. In this context, I can only appeal to delegations to show maximum flexibility, compromise and political will in order to break the impasse that will allow the Conference on Disarmament to get back to work.

Madam Chairperson,

In the field of efforts to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, South Africa will this year have the responsibility to introduce, in consultation with and on behalf of the other two co-ordinators of the annual First Committee omnibus small arms resolution, namely Colombia and Japan, that resolution during this session. We firmly believe that we cannot allow the fact that we were unable to agree on a final report at this year's Review Conference to detract from the implementation of the UN Programme of Action on small arms and light weapons. In addition, the importance of this resolution as the main implementation framework for the Programme of Action and its follow-up has not diminished.

Accordingly, our intention is to reaffirm the importance of the implementation of the Programme of Action at the national, regional and global levels, as well as the international instrument to trace illicit small arms and light weapons; to express support for the process on the illicit brokering that will commence soon; as well as emphasising the necessity to maintain the relevance of the consultative process on the implementation of the Programme of Action, in particular the agreed system of the biennial meetings of States.

Madam Chairperson,

As we approach the Third Review Conference of the Meeting of High Contracting Parties to the Certain Conventional Weapons Convention (CCW), we believe that we need to take serious stock of our progress since the previous Review Conference in 2001. Indeed, we have managed to negotiate and adopt Protocol V on explosive remnants of war in November 2003, but we have also noted since then the slow progress on other CCW issues being considered by the Group of Governmental Experts. We trust that the forthcoming Review Conference will afford the opportunity to achieve substantive progress on outstanding issues and stand ready to engage with other delegations to make such progress a reality.

Regarding the Biological Weapons Convention, South Africa believes that the Sixth Review Conference, due to take place later this year, affords States Parties to the Convention with an opportunity to strengthen this very important disarmament and non-proliferation instrument. The Conference will present the first opportunity for States Parties to do a thorough review of the Convention since 1996. As the international

security environment has changed substantially in the last decade, South Africa accords great importance to the review and the strengthening of the BTWC.

Madam Chairperson,

With reference to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), South Africa will later this month be hosting a seminar for Southern African States Parties to the CWC, on national implementation measures under the Convention. We are organising the seminar in co-operation with the Secretariat of the OPCW and with the assistance of The Netherlands. The aim of the seminar is to increase awareness of the Chemical Weapons Convention amongst the senior policy makers in States Parties from Southern Africa and to consider a plan of action to harmonise the implementation of the CWC within the SADC sub-region.

We appreciate the difficulties that some possessor States are experiencing with regard to the destruction programmes of their chemical weapons stockpiles. We, however, urge them to ensure that their chemical weapons stockpiles are destroyed within the agreed time frames and as soon as possible.

Madam Chairperson,

Our efforts in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation to date appear to have been less than sterling and surely much more could -- and should -- be done to ensure a safer world for all our citizens. We cannot continue to conduct "business-as-usual" and remain oblivious to the fact that our "business" has virtually come to a standstill.

If we were running a company whose business it was to promote and secure disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control, I am certain that warning lights would already have been flashing brightly for some time. Our capital is dwindling, our shares are falling and our shareholders are becoming impatient. But all is not lost if we can see challenges in stead of problems and solutions in stead of obstacles. However, if we are to remedy the situation we need to act, and we need to act quickly. We must mobilize our political capital, intensify our international efforts and re-invest in disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control. In this we may succeed if we can show the necessary flexibility, compromise and political will

I thank you.