



THE PERMANENT MISSION OF
SOUTH AFRICA
TO THE UNITED NATIONS

333 East 38th Street
9th Floor
New York, NY 10016
Tel: (212) 213-5583
Fax: (212) 692-2498
E-mail: pmun@southafrica-newyork.net

**STATEMENT
BY**

**H.E. AMBASSADOR LESLIE M. GUMBI
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE
TO THE UNITED NATIONS IN VIENNA**

**DURING THE FIRST COMMITTEE
GENERAL DEBATE**

**UNITED NATIONS
NEW YORK
10 OCTOBER 2008**

Check against delivery

STATEMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA DURING THE GENERAL DEBATE OF THE FIRST COMMITTEE DURING THE 63rd SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

First of all, I wish to congratulate you on your assumption of the Chair of the 2008 First Committee Session and assure you of South Africa's full support and co-operation. My delegation fully associates itself with the statements delivered on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, the African Group and the New Agenda Coalition.

Chairperson,

We are meeting here today at a time when disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control are faced with serious challenges due to lack of significant progress in ridding the world of weapons of mass destruction. Despite this drawback South Africa hopes that this year's First Committee session will strive for consensus on the important issues before us that have a direct bearing on international peace and security.

In the various international disarmament fora, South Africa has repeatedly cautioned that for as long as some countries have nuclear weapons, there will be others who will also aspire to possess them. South Africa believes that the continued possession of nuclear weapons, or the retention of the nuclear weapons option by some States, perpetuates the danger that they will be used, or fall into the hands of non-state actors and that their possession does not enhance international peace and security.

While the primary responsibility for undertaking the necessary steps for the elimination of nuclear weapons lies with the nuclear-weapon States, it should be emphasized that the obligation to work towards this goal also lies with all States. Nuclear weapons are not only a threat to their possessors; they are a threat to all of humankind.

Chairperson,

For South Africa, the NPT remains the cornerstone of nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation and we will continue to promote universal adherence to it. However, the States Parties to the NPT cannot choose to selectively apply outcomes of the Treaty-based system that suit them in particular circumstances, or at a given time. The Treaty, as well as the outcomes of its Review Conferences, remains as valid as ever.

Concern also remains at the lack of the expected progress following the unequivocal undertaking by the nuclear-weapon States to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals leading to nuclear disarmament agreed to at the 2000 NPT Review Conference. Any presumption of the indefinite possession of nuclear weapons by the nuclear-weapon States remains incompatible with the provisions of the NPT, as well as with the broader goal of the maintenance of international peace and security.

Chairperson,

With regard to the issue of security assurances, South Africa believes that legally binding security assurances will enhance strategic stability, facilitate the process of the elimination of nuclear weapons and contribute to international confidence and security. In addition, it will counteract approaches to the broader role of nuclear weapons as part of security strategies, including rationalizations for the use, and the possible development of new types, of nuclear weapons.

South Africa is of the view that security assurances rightfully belong to those States that have foresworn the nuclear-weapons option, as opposed to those who still prefer to keep their options open. The NPT is the primary international legal instrument in terms of which the non-nuclear-weapon States have foregone the nuclear weapons option. South Africa therefore regards the provision of internationally legally binding security assurances as a key element of the NPT and we will consequently continue to pursue negative security assurances within that framework.

South Africa would like to remind delegations that at the Ministerial meeting held in support of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) we collectively underscored the importance of the CTBT as a major instrument in the field of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. South Africa believes that the continued non-entry into force of the Treaty will weaken the disarmament and non-proliferation regime and undermine the international community's quest to achieve a world free of nuclear weapons. The entry into force of the CTBT is therefore a pressing goal and a non-negotiable commitment of all States Signatories. South Africa will continue to work relentlessly with all concerned to achieve the entry into force of this important pillar of the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime.

South Africa welcomes the nuclear weapons states sharing of information about their nuclear weapons arsenals and their nuclear disarmament objectives even though more could still be done. In this connection my delegation encourages those States to give some thought as to how the provision of information could be further improved and regularized in order to promote transparency and confidence building on their nuclear weapons arsenals including their removal from high alert status.

Chairperson

South Africa welcomes the final outcome of the Second Review Conference reviewed the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention in April this year. The Review Conference reiterated the fundamental importance of completely destroying all chemical weapons by the extended 2012 deadline, to preserve the integrity of the Convention and maximizing its contribution to international peace and security. South Africa is therefore pleased with the statements of those chemical weapons possessor States Parties which have indicated that they will destroy their stockpiles within the agreed deadlines, and call on those possessor States Parties that seem to cast doubt about their ability to live up to the extended deadlines, to fulfil their obligations as agreed.

We welcome the fact that States Parties' right to use chemicals for purposes not prohibited by the Convention was reiterated by the Second Review Conference as well as the importance of strengthening international cooperation and assistance to developing States Parties. The major challenge now facing States Parties is to ensure the decisions and recommendations of the Conference are implemented in order to realise the full implementation of the Convention.

Chairperson,

The Third Biennial Meeting of States (BMS3) on the UN Programme of Action (UNPoA) restarted the formal international consideration of the implementation of the UNPoA on the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, following the failure of the 2006 Review Conference to agree on either a substantive outcome, or a procedural one that would have set out a timetable for future meetings. South Africa had the honour, along with Colombia and Japan, to introduce the omnibus small arms resolution following that Review Conference, which mandated BMS3. Through the adoption of a substantive report at the end of BMS3, the UN small arms process is now widely considered to be back on track.

States Parties to the Mine Ban Treaty face an important task when they meet during the Ninth Meeting of States Parties next month, as they will need to decide on requests for extensions of deadlines for completing the destruction of emplaced anti-personnel mines in accordance with Article 5 of the Convention. This is particularly challenging, as there is no precedent for taking these decisions and it will require a thorough analysis of the situation in each requesting State. During the Eighth Meeting of States Parties in Jordan last year, South Africa was disappointed to hear how long many mine-affected States Parties had left their national assessments and related clearance implementation plans. While this is indeed the major challenge before 9MSP, let us also use that Conference to restate our commitments to assist the survivors and remind ourselves that victim assistance and their socio-economic reintegration remains a lasting responsibility.

Chairperson,

Turning now to developments in the Conference on Disarmament, South Africa appreciates the efforts undertaken by the six 2008 Presidents of the Conference on Disarmament in order to move forward on a Programme of Work and which culminated in the Presidential Proposal contained in document CD/1840. In this regard, South Africa's delegation to the Conference on Disarmament is on record as cautioning that the perfect should not become the enemy of the good and that if the CD waits for the perfect Programme of Work to be adopted, it will probably wait for a very long time. My delegation acknowledges that all CD Member States have priorities, but believes that different priorities need not necessarily be mutually exclusive. South Africa will therefore continue to promote the view that with a little ingenuity and a lot of flexibility and compromise it should be possible for the CD Members to work with – and not against – each other.

Negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament on a fissile material treaty could become a reality, if States can show the necessary political will to make it happen. South Africa continues to support the placing by all the Nuclear Weapon States of fissile material no longer required for military purposes under international verification.

Chairperson

While South Africa is disappointed that the United Nations Disarmament Commission failed to reach any substantive conclusions during its three cycle of meetings that were completed this year, we wish to reiterate that we attach great importance to the role of the UNDC as the sole deliberative body in the UN disarmament machinery. In this regard South Africa hopes that the General Assembly will soon be able to reach agreement on an agenda for the UNDC's next three cycle of meetings.

Chairperson

The peaceful application of nuclear energy is of particular importance to developing countries given the urgent need for sustainable and accelerated economic growth. The International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) Technical Co-operation (TC) projects are therefore more than just political commitments - they constitute important building blocks to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). We very much appreciate the contribution of the Agency's projects in support of the MDG's especially in the areas of water security, environmental sustainability, the combating of disease, hunger and poverty, as well as maternal and child health.

In Africa, the Agency's efforts in developing synergies and seeking co-operation with the African Union in the context of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) could assist with the transfer of technology to African countries for the benefit of the poorest and least developed of this world.

Over the years, developing countries have repeatedly stressed the need for the funding of the Technical Co-operation (TC) projects to be sufficient, predictable and assured. They have also stressed the need for the TC budget to be increased as it is clearly not sufficient. South Africa believes that the time has arrived to conclusively correct the mistake of the past fifty years by incorporating into the regular budget of the IAEA the funding of TC projects.

Chairperson,

We are indeed in an era where nuclear power has regained prominence due to its potential to enhance the security of energy supply and to mitigate the effects of carbon emissions. This rise in the demand for nuclear power comes with challenges and responsibilities that require the international community to be more vigilant in ensuring that nuclear energy is utilised for peaceful purposes only. In this connection, South Africa strongly believes that the Agency should be provided with the necessary means to

carry out not only its verification mandate, but also to enhance its technical cooperation activities and assistance in a non-discriminatory, efficient and professional manner.

South Africa has on numerous occasions reiterated that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) remains the only internationally recognised competent authority responsible for verifying and assuring compliance with safeguards agreements, with a view to preventing the diversion of nuclear energy from peaceful uses to nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices. That authority should not be undermined in any manner or form, and any concerns regarding non-compliance with safeguards agreements should be directed to the Agency for consideration of any actions that might be required. The Agency also needs to be provided with the necessary means to enhance the safe and secure use of nuclear energy

Chairperson,

On 5 September 2008 the IAEA announced that Dr ElBaradei would not avail himself for another term as Director General. South Africa has the highest regard for the untiring work of Dr. Mohamed ElBaradei and the International Atomic Energy Agency in striving to maintain and expand the use of nuclear energy for exclusively peaceful purposes, which in 2005 brought highest recognition through the award of the Nobel Peace Prize.

South Africa believes that the Agency will need to address the challenges of ensuring the safe and secure use of nuclear energy, enhance its crucial contribution to the improvement of living standards and the combating of poverty, which will strengthen international peace and security. The Agency's central role in our common endeavors to achieve a world free of nuclear weapons through preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons, a mutually reinforcing role in the nuclear disarmament process, would also need to be strengthened.

For these reasons, and as a founding member of the Agency, South Africa decided, as endorsed by the African Union Summit, whom we also warmly thank, to nominate Ambassador Abdul Samad Minty, a seasoned diplomat with decades of experience and dedication to preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons and of their elimination, for the position of Director General of the IAEA.

Since our democratic transformation in 1994 it is the first time we are submitting a South African candidate as an international civil servant. The Agency needs at its helm a good manager, someone with integrity, fairness, experience and deep commitment to the objectives of the Agency.

Throughout our long liberation struggle and since 1994 we have a long record and principled position on advancing the peaceful uses of nuclear energy and Ambassador Abdul Minty has played a pioneering role in this regard.

South Africa, Africa and many countries the world over believe that our experience and knowledge of nuclear matters enable us to share the perspectives of the developed and

developing countries and Ambassador Minty is therefore eminently qualified for the post as Director General of the IAEA.

Chairperson

As we have done in the past I would like to reiterate South Africa's strongly held view that continuous and irreversible progress in nuclear disarmament and other related nuclear arms control measures remain fundamental to the promotion of nuclear non-proliferation. The systematic and progressive elimination of all nuclear weapons and the assurance that they will never be produced again remains the only assurance against their use and this should remain our goal.

Nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation are the two sides of one coin and are mutually reinforcing. The verifiable and irreversible elimination of nuclear weapons would prevent the use of nuclear weapons irrespective of whose hands they are in. This would effectively curb their proliferation because you cannot proliferate what you do not have.

In conclusion, Chairperson,

This Committee has the responsibility to collectively address concerns related to the threat posed by weapons of mass destruction, as well as conventional arms. In fulfilling this responsibility it is incumbent upon us to agree collectively to actions that will strengthen the multilateral system of governance, thereby contributing to the maintenance of international peace and security.

Thank you.