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STATEMENT

BY

H.E. MR. VISHVJIT P. SINGH
MEMBER OF THE INDIAN DELEGATION

AT

THE THEMATIC DEBATE ON
NUCLEAR WEAPONS

IN THE FIRST COMMITTEE

63RD SESSION OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

NEW YORK

16 OCTOBER 2008

Mr. Chairman,

It is a pleasure to see you chairing the thematic debate on Nuclear Weapons. India associates itself with the statement made by Indonesia on behalf of the Nonaligned Movement.

India has consistently attached the highest priority to the goal of nuclear disarmament, both as a national position as well as a member of the Non-Aligned Movement. Speaking at the 63rd session of the General Assembly on 26th September this year, Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh reiterated India's proposal for a Nuclear Weapons Convention prohibiting the development, production, stockpiling and use of nuclear weapons and providing for their complete elimination within a specified time frame.

We recall that the only document on Nuclear Disarmament adopted by consensus by the international community – the Final Document of SSOD I accorded the highest priority to the goal of nuclear disarmament. This year we mark the 30th anniversary of the holding of SSOD I. We would like to convey our appreciation to the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs for highlighting some of the important points of the Final Document of SSOD I.

This year we mark the 20th Anniversary of the “Action Plan for Ushering in a Nuclear-weapon free and Non-Violent World Order” - presented by India's Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to the United Nations in 1988. This statement was a milestone in the global quest for nuclear disarmament. The Action Plan begins with the following words which remain valid to this day.

“Humanity stands at a cross roads of history. The world has lived too long under the sentence of extinction. Nuclear weapons threaten to annihilate human civilization and all that humankind has built through millennia of labor and toil. Nuclear weapon states and non-nuclear weapon states alike are threatened by such a holocaust. It is imperative that nuclear weapons be eliminated.”

This Action plan proved a holistic framework for seeking negotiations for a time bound commitment for the complete elimination of the nuclear weapons to usher in a world free of nuclear weapons and rooted in non-violence. This Action Plan remains by far the most comprehensive initiative on nuclear disarmament. Its central premises listed below remain valid:

- First, a binding commitment by all nations to eliminating nuclear weapons in stages;
- Second, participation of all nuclear weapon states in the process of nuclear disarmament. All other states must also be part of this process;
- Third, demonstration of good faith and building of confidence through tangible progress towards the common goal;

- Fourth, changes in doctrines, policies and institutions to sustain a world free of nuclear weapons.

An international Conference was held in New Delhi 9-10 June this year to mark the twentieth anniversary of the Rajiv Gandhi Action Plan. The keynote address was delivered by Mr. Sergio Duarte, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs. About 200 experts participated in this Conference. Inaugurating the Conference, Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh said "The Rajiv Gandhi Action Plan was a comprehensive exposition of India's approach towards global disarmament and continuity in our thinking." He expressed the hope that other states will agree to a dialogue on these proposals, and will join us in committing to nuclear disarmament.

Over the years several international groups and bodies have lent their voice in favour of nuclear disarmament, including the United Nations General Assembly, the International Court of Justice, and national Parliaments of several countries. The goal of a world free of nuclear weapons has received the support, of eminent people like Henry Kissinger, George Shultz, William Perry and Sam Nunn- all knowledgeable and experienced in this field. The Government of Norway took the initiative to host a major international conference in Oslo in February this year. Another initiative has been launched by the Governments of Australia and Japan focusing on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. High level pronouncements in favour of nuclear disarmament have been made by such countries as France and the United Kingdom.

While individual merits or otherwise of the various proposals need to be discussed, we must recognize that shifting currents of informed opinion are now moving ever stronger in favor of nuclear disarmament. This provides the UNGA an opportunity to create a new political momentum and for the UN disarmament machinery to bring about coherence, integration and universal consensus on the way forward. In this regard we would like to reiterate the significance of convening SSOD IV- a position supported by all NAM countries.

As the sole multilateral negotiating forum on disarmament, there is a heavy burden on the Conference on Disarmament to make progress on nuclear disarmament. The first priority is binding commitments, accompanied by negotiation of specific steps that would reduce and finally eliminate the nuclear threat globally, in a verifiable and irreversible manner, where no state would claim exclusive security based on its possession of nuclear weapons. In fact a nuclear weapon free world would enhance the security of all.

As in previous years, India will be introducing the following resolutions;

First, on behalf of the co-sponsors I would like to introduce the draft resolution entitled "**Convention on the Prohibition of the Use of Nuclear Weapons.**" This resolution reflects the belief of the co-sponsors that a multilateral, universal and legally binding instrument prohibiting the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons will contribute to the mitigation of the nuclear threat and create a climate for negotiations for an agreement on the prohibition of nuclear weapons. It will, thus, serve as an important interim measure until we reach agreement on a step-by-step process for the complete elimination of nuclear weapons. The operative part of the resolution reiterates the call to the Conference on Disarmament to commence negotiations to reach agreement on an international convention on prohibiting the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons under any circumstances.

I also have the honor to introduce on behalf of the co-sponsors the draft resolution on "**Reducing Nuclear Danger.**" This resolution highlights that the hair-trigger posture of nuclear forces carries the unacceptable risk of unintentional or accidental use of nuclear weapons, which could have catastrophic consequences. The operative part of the resolution calls for a review of nuclear doctrines, as also immediate steps to reduce the risk of unintentional or accidental use of nuclear weapons, including through the de-alerting and de-targeting of nuclear weapons and requests the Nuclear Weapon States to take the necessary measures to reduce nuclear dangers.

On the behalf of co-sponsors, India is tabling, as in previous years a draft resolution on "**Measures to prevent terrorists from acquiring weapons of mass destruction.**" This resolution highlights the concerns of the international community and calls upon all Member states to take measures aimed at preventing terrorists from acquiring weapons of mass destruction. It underlines that the international response to this threat needs to be at national, multilateral and global level. This year the resolution has been updated to take into account the "Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism" launched jointly by the Russian Federation and the United States. It also incorporates some suggestions for improvement in Op3 and OP5 to provide clarity on the issue of national measures.

We hope that these resolutions will receive the broadest possible support. Like in previous years we hope that the resolution on "Measures to prevent terrorists from acquiring weapons of mass destruction" will be adopted by consensus.

Thank you.