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**STATEMENT
BY**

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TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

**DURING THE GENERAL DEBATE
FIRST COMMITTEE**

**UNITED NATIONS
GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

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STATEMENT BY SOUTH AFRICA DURING THE GENERAL DEBATE OF THE FIRST COMMITTEE DURING THE 64th SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Thank you, Chairperson,

Allow me to congratulate you on your assumption of the Chair of the 2009 First Committee Session and to assure you of South Africa's full support and co-operation. My delegation associates itself with the statements delivered by Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, as well as Brazil on behalf of the New Agenda Coalition.

At the outset, let me congratulate fellow African States on the entry into force of the Treaty of Pelindaba on 15 July this year. This is yet another expression of the African Continent's conviction that our collective future development and safety is only guaranteed when nuclear weapons are disarmed and abolished.

Chairperson,

South Africa shares the concerns regarding the threat posed by weapons of mass destruction. Due to their reach and indiscriminate nature, these weapons threaten not only individual countries, but the international community as a whole. During the past year, we have witnessed a number of important developments that gave rise to a new optimism, signalling that the stalemate of many years, particularly in the area of nuclear disarmament, may well be over. However, the experience of the past decade that saw a reversal by some States of their commitments and a reinterpretation of their obligations in relation to both nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation have contributed to a confidence deficit and scepticism about the prospects for progress.

Whilst welcoming the positive statements made during the recent past in relation to nuclear disarmament, it is disconcerting that endeavours to address some of the most serious threats to international peace and security continue to be characterised by actions that serve narrow interests and paralyse the relevant multilateral fora that were specifically established to address such concerns. In this regard, we have noted the recent adoption by the UN Security Council of a resolution on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. Whilst South Africa is fully supportive of efforts aimed at strengthening non-proliferation measures, we are nevertheless disappointed that the same attention has not yet been accorded to the equally important issue of nuclear disarmament.

South Africa is of the view that the established instruments in the fields of non-proliferation and disarmament can effectively address the threat posed by weapons of mass destruction. Universal adherence to, full implementation of and compliance with these international agreements, and the complete and early elimination of these weapons, will guarantee that they will never be used. It is our hope that this

year's First Committee session will contribute to our efforts to secure consensus on the important challenges facing our collective security.

Chairperson,

The long outstanding entry-into-force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) continues to weaken the disarmament and non-proliferation regime and undermines the international community's quest for a world free of nuclear weapons. Our common objective of a world free of the threat of these weapons is therefore being impeded by the continued non-entry into force of the Treaty. The entry into force of the CTBT is a pressing goal and a non-negotiable commitment and South Africa will therefore work relentlessly with all concerned to achieve the earliest possible entry-into-force of this important pillar of the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime.

In this connection, South Africa welcomes the recent ratifications of the Treaty by Mozambique, Malawi and Timor-Leste. We are also encouraged by the recent positive comments made by US President Obama and his commitment towards the soonest ratification of the Treaty by the US.

Chairperson,

South Africa welcomes the positive developments in the Conference on Disarmament (CD) that led to the adoption by consensus of a Programme of Work on 29 May 2009. We are, however, disappointed that the CD could not agree on the modalities for the implementation of this decision. We therefore call upon all CD Members to build on what has been accomplished in 2009 and spare no effort to ensure an early start to substantive work in the Conference at the beginning of its 2010 session. Negotiations in the CD on a verifiable fissile material treaty can hopefully soon become a reality, provided that all CD Members are prepared to show the necessary political will to make it happen.

Chairperson,

Turning now to conventional weapons, South Africa looks forward to the Fourth Biennial Meeting of States (BMS4) on the implementation of the UN Programme of Action (UNPoA) on small arms and light weapons. South Africa has the honour, along with Colombia and Japan, to introduce the omnibus small arms resolution during this session and we look forward to constructive consultations on the draft text that we will be submitting shortly. We believe that we have made substantive progress in setting a forward-looking programme of work until 2012. My delegation hopes that the General Assembly is able to adopt the draft resolution by consensus. On substantive matters relating the UNPoA, we believe that there is still room for improved co-operation on the international instrument to trace illicit small arms and light weapons, as well as on illicit brokering.

Chairperson,

South Africa will continue to work hand in hand with other UN Member States in the process spelled out in resolution 63/240 entitled "Towards an Arms Trade Treaty: Establishing common international standards for the import, export and transfer of conventional arms", to explore the potential of a feasible international agreement on conventional arms. The last Open-Ended Working Group session on ATT in July 2009 saw the adoption of a procedural report to the 64th session of the General Assembly. South Africa was pleased to see this small milestone accomplished in the process of realising an eventual legally binding international instrument on conventional arms. Although there are still many questions to be answered by Member States concerning inter alia, the specific details of the regulatory framework to be utilised, this alone should not deter Member States from moving forward with this important course. Any further delay to the regulation of arms trade and transfers will see the continual human rights violations and abuses, the destruction and displacement of innocent lives, as well as the oppression of humankind that would continue to undermine developmental goals, especially among the developing countries.

On the issue of landmines, South Africa attaches great importance to the implementation of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. In this regard, South Africa welcomes the conclusion of the Second Preparatory Meeting of the Mine Ban Convention that took place from 3-4 September 2009 in Geneva. South Africa also hosted an African Union Conference on antipersonnel mines from 9-11 September 2009. The aim of this Conference was two-fold: Firstly, to assess the developments in Africa since the 2004 Conference with a view to updating the Common African Position on Anti-Personnel Landmines; and secondly, to prepare for the Second Review Conference of States Parties to the Convention banning anti-personnel mines that will take place in Cartagena, Colombia at the end of this year. South Africa looks forward to participating in the Review Conference and hopes that we will emerge from this Conference united in our quest for the world free of anti-personnel mines. We also hope that this Conference will be able to consolidate some of the implementation provisions, including victim assistance, mine clearance, cooperation and assistance, and stockpile destruction.

South Africa was one of the States that gathered in Oslo, Norway, on 3 December last year to sign the Convention on Cluster Munitions. We firmly believe that a new international standard has been set in the regulation of these weapons. We are in the process of setting the wheels in motion for South Africa's ratification of the Convention. My delegation is of the view that as momentum gathers and more States sign and ratify this Convention, the bulk of cluster munitions as we know them will be stigmatised to the extent that they are no longer used, much the same way as has been the case with anti-personnel mines.

Chairperson,

Efforts are currently underway in The Hague for the Conference of States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) to appoint the new Director-General of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), towards the end of the year. It is important in this regard that the successful candidate is the person with the widest possible support and therefore also the person that has the full confidence and backing of States Parties in dealing with the challenges that lies ahead.

These challenges include the fact that one of the major possessor States Parties has already indicated that it would not be meeting the final 2012 destruction deadline, which has the potential to do serious harm to the CWC. The OPCW also needs to determine destruction deadlines for new possessor States Parties as well as dealing with new situations not foreseen by the Convention such as the destruction of chemical weapons in conflict situations. It will further be expected of the new Director-General to carefully balance the OPCW's non-proliferation activities with its support and cooperation that benefit the majority of its Member States that possess neither chemical weapons nor significant chemical industries.

Chairperson,

While is disappointed that the United Nations Disarmament Commission failed to reach any substantive conclusions during its previous three-year cycle of meetings, South Africa is encouraged by the agenda which the Commission adopted earlier this year and by the work already undertaken in this regard. We wish to reiterate that we attach the highest importance to the role of the UNDC as the sole deliberative body in the UN disarmament machinery.

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 on actions that will strengthen the multilateral system of governance, thereby contributing to the maintenance of international peace and security.

Thank you.