Madam President,

Since this is the first time that my delegation is taking the floor under your Presidency, allow me to thank you for your efforts and the manner in which you are leading this Conference. We recognise the serious challenges facing the Conference on Disarmament (CD) as the single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum and assure you of South Africa’s readiness to work with you and the other incoming Presidents for the 2013 Session aimed at unblocking the continued impasse through the resumption of substantive work.

My delegation associates itself with the statement delivered by Brazil on behalf of the New Agenda Coalition (NAC). Like others, we also welcome the statement delivered by the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). We thank the WILPF for its important contribution to our work and support an enhanced engagement between the CD and civil society more broadly.

Madam President,

As you are aware, nuclear disarmament remains our highest priority. It is the lack of progress towards this goal that is our primary concern. Since becoming a Member of the CD, South Africa has consistently argued against maximalist positions that may inhibit efforts to secure progress on the nuclear disarmament agenda. My country has therefore supported a systematic and progressive approach towards achieving our goal of a world without nuclear weapons. We have remained supportive of the commencement and conclusion of negotiations in the CD on a treaty that would ban the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons and other nuclear explosive devices – a fissile material treaty (FMT) that would fulfil both nuclear non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament objectives.

A simple cut-off treaty would clearly not give effect to the demand of the vast majority of States for an instrument that would not only freeze the status quo, but that would also contribute to the objective of a world free from the threat posed by nuclear weapons. If such a treaty is to be an element of a comprehensive framework of mutually-reinforcing instruments, we remain unconvinced that a limited instrument in terms of scope and verification modalities would make a meaningful contribution to nuclear disarmament. An instrument that could reinforce existing inequalities between those that have nuclear weapons and those that have given up the nuclear weapons option would probably not serve our collective interest of achieving a world without nuclear weapons. A treaty that would allow the development of new nuclear weapons may well undermine the primary rationale for the conclusion of such an instrument in the first place.

Madam President,

South Africa does not subscribe to the view that a fissile material treaty is the only item ripe for negotiation or that this should become a condition for further progress towards nuclear disarmament. We are well aware that fissile material, such as weapons-grade plutonium and highly enriched uranium, among others, are critical ingredients for the production of nuclear weapons. The control of such material and their means of production are therefore essential for the control of proliferation. A fissile material treaty could be an important building block of any comprehensive framework to underpin a future world without nuclear weapons. However, this issue could also be dealt with as part of a more comprehensive effort aimed at banning the
production of nuclear weapons.

Madam President,

South Africa believes that a fissile material treaty should be non-discriminatory and verifiable, fulfilling both nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation objectives. Contrary to the arguments about the limitations of a future treaty, South Africa’s experience has shown that despite significant technical complexities that will need to be acknowledged, all of these can be overcome if the necessary political will exists. While we acknowledge the difficulties associated with the past production of fissile material, we believe that stocks should be addressed by a future treaty for it to be a credible instrument. The outright rejection of dealing with stocks even before the start of negotiations seems to be not only counter-productive in taking forward this issue, but also contradicts the so-called Shannon report and the mandate contained therein, and raises questions about the commitment of proponents of this view to the goal of nuclear disarmament. Importantly, such a treaty should give effect to the principles of transparency, irreversibility and verification. For such a treaty to be fully effective, we believe that it should be the product of inclusive multilateral disarmament negotiations.

Madam President,

My delegation wishes to underline, once more, that a fissile material treaty should not become an end in itself. We recognise, however, that the elements of such a treaty are an integral part of the critical steps that would need to be taken with towards achieving and sustaining a world free from the unacceptable humanitarian consequences posed by nuclear weapons, as again highlighted during the recent Conference in Oslo on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons.

I thank you.