STATEMENT
BY
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DURING THE GENERAL DEBATE

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Chairperson,

At the outset, my delegation wishes to congratulate you on your appointment as Chairperson of the 2013 UN First Committee and to associate itself with the statements delivered respectively by Indonesia, Nigeria and Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, the African Group and the New Agenda Coalition.

Chairperson,

The disarmament and international security landscape has seen some improvement over the last year with the adoption of the text of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) in the General Assembly. At the time of the vote, when South Africa voted in favour of the ATT’s adoption, our delegation stated that this is an “international instrument that fills a glaring gap that existed in the global conventional arms control system”. The fact that South Africa was eager for President Zuma to sign the ATT during UNGA68 reflects the importance my country attributes to this highly relevant Treaty.

Beyond this welcome development, much remains to be done. Progress on the various undertakings towards disarmament is not yet within our grasp. The disarmament machinery established under the First Special Session of the General Assembly devoted to Disarmament in 1978 is stagnant and the First Committee remains divided on many key issues.

The continuing stalemate in the Conference on Disarmament (CD) undermines its credibility and raises questions about its continued relevance. It is therefore imperative that the work of the CD is revitalized so that it can again discharge its mandate as the world’s single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum.

Chairperson,

With each passing year, it has become clearer that the vast majority of UN Member States are exasperated with the lack of progress on nuclear disarmament. UN Member States actively participated in the Open Ended Working Group to take forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations, and the General Assembly recently held a High Level Meeting on nuclear disarmament. The successful outcomes of the High Level Meeting and the Open Ended Working Group demonstrate what is indeed possible.

It is evident that achievements in the area of nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation remain particularly uneven. The regime established by the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) is constantly re-affirmed by the majority of the international community, yet the nuclear disarmament pillar of the Treaty remains neglected, in contrast to the progress made in strengthening nuclear non-proliferation. It is South Africa’s firm belief that nuclear weapons do not provide security, but rather exacerbate insecurity.
The deliberations of the March 2013 Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons held in Oslo reminded the international community of the devastating impact that a nuclear detonation would have. The very existence of nuclear weapons means that humanity faces the peril of a nuclear catastrophe. We therefore welcome the follow-up conference that will be hosted by Mexico in 2014 and the continued focus on the humanitarian consequences of these weapons.

Beyond the general lack of implementation of nuclear disarmament undertakings, we are equally concerned about the failure to convene a Conference in 2012 on the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. It remains our hope that this Conference will be convened as soon as possible.

Chairperson,

In the area of chemical weapons, South Africa was alarmed at the escalations that took place in the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic and condemned the use of chemical weapons. The use of these weapons in Syria is of serious concern and is wholly unacceptable by any standard. No cause could ever justify the use of weapons of mass destruction by any actor under any circumstances. We therefore welcome the accession of Syria to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). It is imperative that all the parties in Syria and the international community provide their fullest support and co-operation to the OPCW in fulfilling its mandate in securing, verifying and destroying all chemical weapons in Syria as soon as possible within the agreed timeframe.

We are pleased at the successful outcome of the Third Review Conference on the implementation of the CWC, and call on the Organisation and the individual States Parties to work together to realise the agreements reached. A challenge remaining for the Organization which needs urgent and concerted efforts of all States Parties is that of universality of the Convention. States Parties need to redouble their efforts to encourage the States not party to the Convention to join it. It is in this context that South Africa extends its congratulations to Somalia for joining the Convention.

Chairperson,

Given the rapid pace of developments in the life sciences, South Africa believes that the strengthening of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC) and its full implementation remain important priorities. In this regard, States Parties should maximise the opportunities created through the decisions of the 7th BTWC Review Conference. Central to our common goal of eliminating the threat posed by biological weapons is the need to ensure that Member States are given opportunities to realise the vast potential that biological technology hold for advancing capacity and socio-economic development, particularly in developing States Parties.
Chairperson,

On the issue of cluster munitions, South Africa has on many occasions expressed concern about the humanitarian impact of these munitions. As a Signatory to the Convention on Cluster Munitions, South Africa is fully committed to the implementation of all its provisions.

South Africa continues to believe that the UN Programme of Action on small arms and light weapons (UNPoA) represents the central universally agreed set of undertakings to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons and that its full implementation remains as relevant today as when it was adopted in 2001. Apart from national implementation efforts, my delegation wishes to emphasise the full implementation of the entire UNPoA, including that of its undertakings related to the issue of international co-operation and assistance. The task relating to the successful and full implementation of the UNPoA at all levels rests on all our shoulders -- Member States, international and regional organisations, in partnership with civil society. It is a task that none of us are able to do alone.

Chairperson,

My delegation stands ready to participate actively in the work of this year’s First Committee and to join you and other delegations in making a success of our work.

I thank you.