STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR JERRY MATJILA, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF SOUTH AFRICA TO THE UNITED NATIONS DELIVERED DURING THE GENERAL DEBATE OF THE FIRST COMMITTEE

10 October 2018

Chairperson,

At the outset my delegation would like to congratulate you on your appointment as Chairperson of the 2018 First Committee and assure you of our full support and cooperation under your capable stewardship. South Africa associates itself with the statements delivered on behalf of the African Group, the Non-Aligned Movement and the New Agenda Coalition.

Chairperson,

As we convene another First Committee Session, it is incumbent on us to reflect on the progress we have made as well as the areas in which we have fallen short. Once again my delegation regrets that the action in the Conference on Disarmament (CD) in 2018 did not meet expectations for an end to the protracted impasse. While South Africa remains committed to a functioning Conference on Disarmament, it is regrettable that even though we have a body that is mandated to negotiate multilateral disarmament instruments, it has not discharged its basic mandate for the past 22 years. We therefore urgently need to attend to the current state of the Conference on Disarmament. We can no longer engage in past repetitive activities that have not brought the Conference closer to an agreement on a Programme of Work, but rather have distracted the CD from the imperative of reaching consensus on a Programme of Work and starting negotiations, all the while creating the illusion that substantive work is taking place. We therefore call on Members States to show increased flexibility and a willingness to move beyond narrow interests to ensure progress in the CD.

Chairperson,

The current NPT review cycle which coincides with the 50th anniversary of the Treaty presents an opportunity to make urgent progress on nuclear disarmament. In this regard, we emphasis the value of a constructive and successful preparatory process leading to the 2020 Review Conference, in order to strengthen the Treaty and make progress towards its full implementation and universality. Likewise at this critical juncture it is important that any future outcome should not roll back or reinterpret the agreements reached during the 1995 and 2000 Review Conferences and further reaffirmed by the 2010 Review Conference, which constitute nuclear disarmament benchmarks. It is my delegation’s strong conviction that the vitality and relevance of the Treaty, as the foundation of the nuclear non-proliferation regime, is dependent on the extent to which State Parties implement their obligations and commitments. In this regard Article VI of the NPT makes it clear that nuclear disarmament is an obligation on all States Parties. It is therefore a shared responsibility of all States to prevent any use of nuclear weapons, to curb their proliferation and to achieve nuclear disarmament. Chairperson, as we pay tribute to the late former United Nations Secretary General, His Excellency Kofi Annan, we are reminded of his words when he said ‘we cannot choose between non-proliferation and disarmament. We must tackle both tasks with the urgency
they demand'. We therefore call for the full implementation of all commitments and obligations by NPT nuclear weapon states in order to enhance the good standing of the Treaty.

A year after the adoption of the landmark Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), we reaffirm our commitment to this historic milestone for nuclear disarmament and encourage States that have not yet done so, to sign and ratify the Treaty to ensure its early entry into force. The TPNW and the NPT are fully compatible and, indeed, complementary. After all, both share the same goal at their core – the abolition of nuclear weapons. Additionally, the TPNW provides the opportunity for those states that are not located in nuclear-weapon-free-zones to join an instrument that expresses total opposition to nuclear weapons. And while the TPNW is not the final word on nuclear weapons, it remains a critical step in the evolution of the regime that would be required to achieve and eventually maintain a world without nuclear weapons. South Africa's ratification process is expected to be completed in the very near future.

In the area of chemical weapons, South Africa reaffirms its commitment to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and believes that CWC States Parties should be united in preserving the international norm against chemical weapons and strict adherence to the provisions of the Convention and its consistent and non-discriminatory implementation. In this regard we reiterate the importance of the work of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and emphasise the need for this organisation to carry out its mandate without political interference, ensuring its impartiality as the only technically competent international authority in this area.

Chairperson,

As a State Party to the Anti-Personnel Mine-Ban Convention, South Africa looks forward to the forthcoming Seventeenth Meeting of States Parties (17MSP). We, however, remained concerned at reports of the rising number of victims from anti-personnel mines, improvised explosive devices, unexploded ordinance and other explosive remnants of war. We therefore encourage those States that have not yet done so, particularly those possessing such weapons, to join the relevant instruments without delay. We further call on those States in a position to do so, to assist requesting States in their national implementation efforts and to provide assistance to the victims of these weapons.

South Africa firmly believes that the full and effective implementation of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) will tangibly contribute to promoting international and regional peace, security and stability, as well as socio-economic development, thereby providing a solid basis for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In this regard we welcome the outcome of the Fourth Conference of States Parties (CSP4) of the ATT and look forward to the full implementation of the Treaty, in regulating international trade in conventional arms and in contributing towards the elimination of illicit transfers.

Chairperson, it is against this backdrop that my delegation stands ready to participate actively in the work of this year's First Committee and invites other delegations to support the realisation of positive outcomes at this Session.

I thank you