STATEMENT BY SOUTH AFRICA ON BEHALF OF THE NEW AGENDA COALITION
AT THE FIRST COMMITTEE: GENERAL DEBATE

8 October 2015

Mr Chairperson,

I have the honour to take the floor on behalf of the members of the New Agenda Coalition (NAC) namely Brazil, Egypt, Ireland, Mexico, New Zealand and my own country, South Africa. At the outset, the NAC would like to congratulate you on your assumption of the Chair of this year’s First Committee and would also like to assure you of the NAC’s full cooperation and support with the view to the successful conclusion of our deliberations during the next four weeks.

As we have done in the past, the NAC will present a draft resolution to this Committee which will be introduced during the thematic debate on nuclear weapons.

Mr. Chairperson,

In founding the NAC in 1998, the Foreign Ministers of our respective countries were motivated by the continued threat to humanity represented by the continued existence of nuclear weapons and the possibility of use or threat of use of these weapons. This threat continues to drive the NAC in advocating the cause of nuclear disarmament for the achievement and maintenance of a world free of nuclear weapons.

Whilst there has been progress in limiting the horizontal proliferation of nuclear weapons, the NAC remains concerned that there has been limited progress on nuclear disarmament, despite the fact that nuclear disarmament has been on the international agenda since nuclear weapons were first used. Sixty-nine years after the UN General Assembly sought to initiate a process to achieve “the elimination from national armaments of atomic weapons and of all other major weapons adaptable for mass destruction,” much remains to be done to achieve and maintain a nuclear-weapons-free world.
Given the scale of devastation that nuclear weapons are designed to inflict, the fact that their consequences cannot be constrained within national borders and the ever increasing risk associated with a nuclear weapon detonation, the continued reliance upon them in security doctrines and concepts is immoral, unethical and provides a motivation to proliferate. For the NAC, there can never be right hands for the wrong weapons!

Mr Chairperson,

As you are aware, this year’s First Committee coincides with the 70th anniversary of the United Nations. It also coincides with the 70th anniversary of the nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. These key milestones represent an historic opportunity for all States to advance nuclear disarmament. They remind us of the immense trail of death and destruction resulting from the first use of atomic weapons, which should never be used again under any circumstances.

The NAC therefore deeply regrets the lack of any substantive outcome at the 2015 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). We believe that this was a missed opportunity that could have contributed to enhancing progress towards the full implementation of commitments and obligations agreed to at the 1995, 2000 and 2010 Review Conferences. The NAC is gravely concerned about the impact of this development on the credibility of the NPT and the nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation regime.

Despite the challenges, the NAC welcomes the renewed attention to the catastrophic humanitarian consequences and risks associated with nuclear weapons that has been generated by the international community since 2010, and the growing awareness that these concerns should underpin the vital need for nuclear disarmament and the urgency of achieving and maintaining a nuclear-weapon-free world. We therefore welcome the compelling evidence presented at the Conferences on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons which detailed the catastrophic consequences that would result from a nuclear weapon detonation.

This initiative, together with the crucial role that civil society plays, has managed to create a growing awareness of the threat that even a single nuclear weapon poses to humanity, let alone the estimated 16,400 weapons that still exist, many on high alert status and ready to deploy within minutes.

Mr Chairperson,

The NAC continues to believe that the NPT remains the cornerstone of the nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation regime. However, we have been disappointed by the slow pace of nuclear disarmament, both at the regional and global
levels, despite successive undertakings from the nuclear-weapon-States. Although undertakings are not lacking in this field, concrete progress is. Indeed, notwithstanding the significant reductions that have made since Cold War highs, bilateral reductions are no substitute for multilateral disarmament implemented in accordance with the principles of irreversibility, verifiability and transparency.

The NAC expresses disappointment and deep concern that the 1995 resolution on the establishment of the Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction has yet to be implemented. We therefore call upon all States Parties to the NPT to work towards its full implementation, which is inextricably linked to the indefinite extension of the Treaty.

It is now time that the international community translate words into concrete action backed by clear benchmarks and timelines. The NAC believes that the nuclear-weapon States should not only implement their previous commitments and obligations, but should strive to build on the agreements made in 1995, 2000 and 2010 as this would contribute in taking forward the aims and purpose of the Treaty.

Mr Chairperson,

Nuclear disarmament is not only an international legal obligation, but also a moral and ethical imperative. In spite of the growing international consensus regarding the illegitimacy of nuclear weapons, they still remain at the heart of the security doctrines of nuclear-weapon States and those party to regional alliances with nuclear-weapon States. Far from strengthening international peace and security, this state of affairs serves to weaken it, aggravating international tensions and conflict, and jeopardizing the collective well-being of all States and peoples. It further engenders a perception that nuclear-weapon States harbour aspirations for the indefinite possession of these weapons contrary to their legal obligations and commitments.

Indeed, in a world where the basic human needs of billions are not being met the growing spending on nuclear weapons is both unacceptable and unsustainable. The allocation of vast resources to retain and modernize nuclear weapons is at odds with international aspirations to development, as expressed recently by world leaders to the achievement of the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals. Rather than squandering resources on nuclear weapons, governments should direct much-needed resources towards socio-economic development.

Mr Chairperson,

Given that more than four decades have passed since the entry into force of the NPT, the status quo on nuclear disarmament is no longer acceptable. The NAC believes that it is now time for States to deliver upon their commitment to the elimination of nuclear
weapons, in line with their obligations under Article VI together with the subsequent unequivocal undertaking made by nuclear-weapons States to eliminate their nuclear arsenals. As such, there is an urgent need for the commencement of negotiations in good faith on nuclear disarmament. Unless and until all options for the negotiations of effective measures are explored, the present and unacceptably slow pace of disarmament will continue. In this regard, we urge all States to explore options and support efforts to identify, elaborate and negotiate legally-binding effective measures for nuclear disarmament in keeping with the spirit and purpose of General Assembly resolution 1 (1) of 24 January 1946 and Article VI of the NPT.

Mr Chairperson,

The NAC urges all States parties to seize the opportunity of this First Committee to make a difference on nuclear disarmament.