STATEMENT BY SOUTH AFRICA DURING THE THEMATIC DEBATE ON NUCLEAR WEAPONS, 19 October 2015

Chairperson,

South Africa fully associates itself with the statements delivered on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and the New Agenda Coalition.

As long as nuclear weapons exist, humankind will continue to face the threat of catastrophe. Experience demonstrates that the immense, uncontrollable capability and indiscriminate nature of a nuclear weapons detonation reaches well-beyond national borders, leaving a trail of death and destruction in its wake. This impact -- including the longer-term humanitarian, environmental and socio-economic consequences -- will be with us for generations, together with the ever-increasing risk of a nuclear weapons detonation, whether by accident, miscalculation or design. The international community has overwhelmingly voiced their concern at this grave threat. South Africa therefore welcomes the three international conferences convened respectively by Norway in March 2013, Mexico in February 2014 and Austria in December 2014 on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons and the compelling evidence presented at these conferences. In addition, we also welcome the increasing number of States that have endorsed the “Humanitarian Pledge”, which in particular, urges all States parties to the NPT to renew their commitment to the urgent and full implementation of existing obligations under Article VI, and calls upon all States to identify and pursue effective measures to fill the legal gap for the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons and to cooperate with all stakeholders to achieve this goal. In this context, we call upon all States to join the “Humanitarian Pledge” in order to achieve this ultimate goal.

The vast public resources diverted towards nuclear weapons stand in stark contrast to the delivery of development assistance in support of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Post-2015 Global Development Agenda that will carry forward the mandate of the MDGs. Today, the costs associated with the maintenance of nuclear arsenals amount to roughly more than double the development assistance provided to Africa. This state of affairs is clearly neither acceptable nor sustainable in a world where the basic human needs of billions cannot be met.

As long as nuclear weapons exist, vertical and horizontal proliferation will persist. The continued development of new categories of nuclear weapons and their delivery systems, together with the fact that nuclear weapons remain entrenched in the security doctrines of nuclear weapons States and their allies, provides a clear indication that some countries continue to harbour aspirations for the indefinite retention of these weapons, contrary to their legal obligations and commitments.
All efforts must therefore be exerted to eliminate these threats. The only way to guarantee that nuclear weapons will never be used again is through their total elimination and the legally-binding assurance that they will never be produced again. All States have a legitimate stake in, and responsibility, for nuclear disarmament. As such, South Africa believes that all of us -- developed and developing, nuclear-weapon or non-nuclear weapons States -- have a contribution to make towards the construction of a framework for the achievement and maintenance of a world without nuclear weapons, which should include clearly defined benchmarks and timelines backed by a strong system of verification.

Chairperson,

South Africa is gravely concerned by the failure of the 9th NPT Review Conference to reach consensus on an outcome document. This has raised questions regarding the commitment of some States to the implementation of the agreements reached in 1995, 2000 and 2010 and the legally-binding obligations under the Treaty, particularly those related to the implementation of Article VI, which concerns negotiations in good faith on legally-binding effective measures. This also includes, among others, the commitments made towards deeper reductions in the number of nuclear weapons, reducing reliance on nuclear weapons in military doctrines, the entry-into-force of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), the provision of legally-binding security assurances to non-nuclear-weapon States, and the conclusion of a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons and other nuclear explosive devices. In this context, the lack of a substantive outcome of the NPT Review Conference was a missed opportunity that could have contributed to strengthening the Treaty. States Parties should therefore re-double their efforts and implement their solemn commitments, including those by the nuclear-weapon States to accelerate concrete progress on the steps leading to nuclear disarmament.

In conclusion, Chairperson, let me reiterate that nuclear weapons have no place in today’s security environment. Instead of deterring conflict and war, as some allege, these weapons have remained a constant source of insecurity and driver of proliferation. The humanitarian imperatives that underpin the need for their complete elimination demand a renewed commitment and determination by all to the achievement and maintenance of a world without nuclear weapons. South Africa stands ready to contribute towards this end. Nuclear disarmament is not only a legal obligation, but is equally a moral imperative. In this regard, South Africa will be tabling a resolution entitled “Ethical Imperatives for a Nuclear-Weapons-Free World”, which we hope would be supported by all delegations.

I thank you, Chairperson.