Statement by Dr. Ebun Strasser-King (Mrs.), Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Republic of Sierra Leone on behalf of the African Group at the Thematic debate of the First Committee: Nuclear Weapons

New York, 20th October, 2015

Mr. Chairman,

1. I am honoured to speak on behalf of the African Group.

2. The Group aligns itself with the Statement of the Non-Aligned Movement delivered by the distinguished Representative of Indonesia on the threat posed to humanity by the continued existence of nuclear weapons and of their possible use or threat of use.

3. The Group reaffirms that the total elimination of nuclear weapons remains the only absolute guarantee against their use or threat of use. It therefore reiterates the urgent need for our world, including the outer space, to be free of nuclear weapons, as their presence constitutes an existential threat to the planet, global peace and the future survival of humanity. Africa supports the principle of complete nuclear disarmament, as the utmost prerequisite for maintaining international peace and security.

4. It is the view of the African Group, that the highest priority remains nuclear disarmament to achieve the total elimination of nuclear weapons, which is the overall objective of the NPT. The Group therefore regrets the failure of the 9th NPT Review Conference to reach consensus on a final outcome document, despite the concerted efforts of non-nuclear weapon States, particularly from Africa. In this context, the Group remains deeply concerned over the slow pace of progress towards nuclear disarmament and the lack of progress by the nuclear-weapon States to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals, in accordance with their legal obligations as provided in the relevant international treaties and conventions. The Group will continue to highlight the threat posed to humanity by the continued existence of nuclear weapons and would insist on the
implementation of all agreed measures and undertakings by the, nuclear weapons states in the context of the Treaty.

5. The Group welcomes the second General Assembly Plenary Meeting in commemoration of the "International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons" and underscores the importance of resolution 69/58 as an integral part of the multilateral effort at nuclear disarmament. The full implementation of this resolution, particularly through the commencement of negotiations in the CD for the conclusion of a comprehensive convention on nuclear weapons, will ensure concrete progress towards the objective of eliminating these weapons of mass destruction.

6. The African Group acknowledges the useful purposes served by the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones in the consolidation of the NPT and in addressing nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation across all regions of the world. They enhance global and regional peace and security, strengthen the nuclear non-proliferation regime and contribute towards realizing the objectives of nuclear disarmament. The status of Africa as a nuclear-weapon-free zone provides a shield for the continent, including by preventing the stationing of nuclear explosive devices on the territory and prohibiting testing of those destructive weapons.

7. In this regard, the African Group restates its deep concern at the fact that commitments and obligations of the 1995 resolution on the Middle East, including the Action Plan of the 2010 NPT Review Conference regarding the establishment of a zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East, have not been implemented as agreed. The Group is unequivocal in its disappointment of the failure to convene the Conference on the establishment of the said zone in the Middle East, which should have been held in 2012. The 1995 resolution remains an integral and essential part of the package and the basis upon which consensus was reached on the indefinite extension of the NPT in 1995. The Group therefore wishes to underscore the validity of these commitments and obligations and looks forward to their full implementation.

8. The African Group also stresses the importance of achieving universal adherence to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), bearing in mind the special responsibilities of Nuclear Weapons States in this regard. The CTBT offers a hope of halting further development or proliferation of nuclear weapons, thereby contributing to the goal of nuclear disarmament. The Group
supports the international community in its commitment to promoting the CTBT, a treaty that could serve as a threshold for promoting the process of nuclear disarmament and encourages the remaining Annex II countries, in particular, nuclear weapon States and those yet to accede to the NPT, to sign and ratify the CTBT.

8. The Group recognizes that the IAEA is the sole competent authority for the verification of compliance with obligations under the respective safeguards agreements of Member States. The Group expresses confidence in the impartiality and professionalism of the IAEA and rejects any attempt to politicize its work, including its technical cooperation program, in violation of its Statute.

9. In this context, the Group underlines the importance of strict observance of the IAEA statute and relevant comprehensive safeguards agreements in conducting verification activities. Bearing in mind the Agency’s responsibility in protecting safeguards confidential information and given the undesirable incidents of leakage of such information, the Group stresses the need for strengthening the regime for the protection of safeguards confidential information.

10. While it is agreeable that the inalienable rights of all States to the Treaty to develop research, production and use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes must be protected, the Group also calls upon all States to renounce possession of nuclear weapons, to accede to the NPT without precondition and any further undue or tactical delay, and to promptly place all existing nuclear facilities under IAEA full-scope safeguards and to conduct nuclear related activities in conformity with the non-proliferation regime.

11. The Group stresses the need to de-emphasize security dependence on nuclear weapons and considers any doctrine justifying their use as unacceptable. The Group further supports, as a high priority, the call for the conclusion of a universal, unconditional and legally binding instrument on negative security assurances by Nuclear Weapons States to all Non-Nuclear Weapons States (NNWS), pending the total elimination of nuclear weapons.

12. The African Group further reiterates its serious concern for the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons and continues to call on States, particularly the nuclear weapons States, to consider the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of the use of these weapons on human health, the environment and vital economic resources among others, and take necessary measures aimed at
dismantling and renunciation of these weapons. In that regard, the Group calls on the nuclear weapon states to honourably respect their commitment to our collective pledge to protect and sustain our planet for our succeeding generations. In that light, the Group welcomes the three international conferences on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons convened in Norway, Mexico and Austria to highlight the dangers of nuclear weapons to humanity. It is in this context that the Group strongly supports the call for a legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons, the only Weapon of Mass Destruction not yet prohibited by an international legal instrument.

13. We appreciate the support of delegations for the African Group’s resolution on the African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty. The Group will remain constructively engaged with all Member States with the view to fulfilling the goal and objectives of a nuclear-weapon free world.

I thank you for your attention.