STATEMENT by TURKEY

at the General Debate of
the First Committee of the 70th Session of the
United Nations General Assembly

12 October 2015, New York
Mr. Chairman,

I would like to congratulate you and the members of the Bureau on your election. Against the backdrop of serious threats to international peace and security, this Committee is expected to make great effort to achieve tangible results. Turkey attaches great importance to the First Committee’s work, and you can count on our full cooperation during your tenure.

While this Committee’s primary and ultimate objective remains disarmament and non-proliferation, overall military spending continues to increase in face of rising global challenges to security and stability, including the threat of terrorism, as most horrifically demonstrated by the heinous terror attacks on Saturday that took the lives of 97 Turkish citizens. This stark contradiction further impedes the disarmament machinery from performing effectively, if not sufficiently.

We fully share the concerns regarding the danger posed by nuclear weapons to humanity and nature. Our aspiration remains a world without nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. Turkey continues to work with other member states, international organizations and the civil society to uphold that ultimate goal.

To that end, we appreciate the commemoration of the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons as an important event for awareness raising last week on 30 September.

Mr. Chairman

Many distinguished representatives have expressed here—or will do so—their respective countries’ readiness to contribute further to a world without nuclear weapons. We concur with these strong statements. We find them encouraging. Nevertheless, we also believe that our statements must be complemented with concrete steps compatible with the realities on the ground.

From the outset, Turkey has firmly believed in the need for upholding the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) as the centerpiece mechanism of the global disarmament and non-proliferation regime and advocated that only an equal and balanced treatment of the three mutually reinforcing pillars of the Treaty can pave the way towards nuclear disarmament.

As Turkey remains fully committed to the objectives of the NPT, we would like to reaffirm our firm conviction that its implementation through practical steps in an incremental way
must still be seen as the only way forward. We therefore closely follow the discussions around the provisions of Article VI of the Treaty concerning effective measures towards nuclear disarmament. Obviously, the general disappointment stemming from the fact that a consensus document was not adopted at the NPT 2015 Review Conference has heightened this debate.

Although Turkey is ready to discuss which practical steps will be more effective, we would like to urge all stakeholders that there should be no action, which could undermine the integrity of the NPT or create an alternative to its full implementation and universalization.

And for continued relevance of the NPT regime with regard to nuclear disarmament, it goes without saying that the primary responsibility lays with the Nuclear Weapon States. We encourage them to consider effective measures to ensure progress in nuclear disarmament.

On the other hand, it is unfortunate that some member states still remain outside the NPT regime. We call upon them to join the regime, as we support its universalization and effective implementation in good faith and consistency.

Mr. Chairman,

We acknowledge the international safeguards system of the IAEA as the fundamental tool in global non-proliferation efforts. Turkey recognizes the need for the further strengthening and universalization of the Agency’s verification authority. We regard the comprehensive safeguards and the Additional Protocol of the IAEA as an indispensable verification standard, and call on all States that have not yet done so to sign, ratify and implement them as soon as possible. Strengthening the safeguards system and promoting the Agency’s role and finances are also essential for the sustainability of the NPT regime in the long run.

It is our firm belief that States in full compliance with their safeguards obligations should have unhindered access to civilian nuclear technology, as provided for in the NPT. In our view, this would only contribute to the further strengthening and universalization of the NPT regime. We must also ensure that all requisite steps be taken so that there will be no diversion of nuclear programs from peaceful to military uses.

Having said this, we would like to welcome the agreement reached between Iran and P5+1 countries on nuclear issues and also reaffirm our strong desire that the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action be implemented in good faith so as to reassure our neighborhood against proliferation concerns. Turkey, having always supported the
peaceful resolution of this matter through dialogue and diplomacy, and as a country that had offered its good offices to facilitate the deal in the past, welcomes the UN Security Resolution 2231 (2015), which will ensure the enforcement of the JCPOA and guarantee that the IAEA will continue to verify Iran’s compliance with its nuclear-related commitments.

On the other hand, Turkey is concerned that the 1995 resolution on the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction is yet to be implemented.

It is disappointing that during the 2015 NPT RevCon, it has not been possible to reach an agreement on the convening of such a Conference. However this should not be seen as a failure.

If realised, such a step would constitute an important confidence building measure. Turkey will continue to support constructive efforts in this direction.

Mr Chairman,

Turkey strongly believes that the cessation of all nuclear weapon tests constitutes an indispensable measure to achieve both nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. In this regard, we stress the centrality of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) in achieving these objectives.

The international community has waited long-enough for the Treaty to enter into force. We welcome the ratification of the CTBT most recently by Angola, Congo and Niue, and once again invite all states, particularly Annex II states, to ratify the Treaty as soon as possible.

Creating conditions for a world without nuclear weapons, and other weapons of mass destruction, is a major investment towards a safer future and undiminished security for all. Turkey remains deeply concerned by the possible humanitarian catastrophes, should these lethal weapons be used, intentionally or accidently.

Mr. Chairman,

Turkey is part of the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative (NPDI) along with eleven other countries. The NPDI is proving to be a true Middle Powers Initiative that promotes the implementation of the consensus outcomes of the 2010 Review Conference. We continue to make our share towards the advancement of the goals of non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament.
We share the frustration of many member states and the international civil society upon
the non-implementation of the consensus Action Plan of the 2010 Review Conference,
and more importantly, the failure to reach an agreement at the Review Conference in May
2015. We are troubled by the fact that the Review Conference in May 2015 hasn’t allowed
any substantial movement forward. We see that as a serious missed opportunity.

Turkey supports the establishment of internationally recognized and effectively verifiable
zones free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, wherever feasible.
In this respect, we welcome the signing of the Protocol to the Central Asian Nuclear
Weapon Free Zone (CANWFZ) by five nuclear weapon states, providing legally-binding
assurances not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against the Treaty parties. We
encourage full ratification of the treaties and protocols of all five regional zones.

The Conference on Disarmament has a special responsibility in the contemporary
disarmament agenda. We should strive to maintain the relevance of the Conference by
fulfilling its fundamental task. To that end, we hope that the Conference will resume
substantive work as early as possible. The Conference needs to be energized and
revitalized, in order to reassume the unique negotiation role with which it is mandated.
Turkey believes that the Conference on Disarmament possesses the necessary mandate,
membership and rules of procedure in order to effectively discharge its duties.

Moreover, it is our firm belief that starting negotiations on Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty
in Geneva will be a significant building block. It will further pave the way for parallel
advances in the other core agenda items, including nuclear disarmament, negative security
assurances and the prevention of arms race in outer space.

The Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and the Biological and Toxin Weapons
Convention (BTCW) are important components of the global system against proliferation
of weapons of mass destruction. Turkey does not possess any such weapons and reiterates
its call for a wider adherence to and an effective implementation of these Conventions.
We actively support the efforts to promote the implementation and universalization of
these instruments.

Bearing in mind that the CWC is the only comprehensive multilateral treaty banning an
entire category of weapons of mass destruction, Turkey will continue to cooperate with
the OPCW, particularly in regard to the dismantlement of the Syrian regime’s chemical
weapons inventory. We condemn in the strongest terms the use of chemical weapons on
civilian populations in Syria, such as chlorine, which constitutes a brazen violation of the
UN Charter and international humanitarian law and a threat against international peace
and security.
In this regard, even though the 8th Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria presented to Human Rights Council on August 2014 and the 3rd report of the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) on September 2014 indicated clearly the use of chlorine gas as a chemical weapon “systematically and repeatedly” by the Syrian regime within a 10-day period in April 2014, we are concerned to see that the international community could not take the necessary steps in the face of these attacks by the regime, which directly target civilians.

Thereby, we have unfortunately observed new chemical weapons attacks, in the form of chlorine and/or phosgene gas, in and around Idlib city during the course of March and April 2015 by the Syrian regime. It is evident that the Syrian regime sees itself to be encouraged by the inaction of the international community. In this vein, we hope that the UN-OPCW Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) will serve as a mechanism to hold the perpetrators of these attacks responsible for their gross human rights violations. It is our firm expectation that the JIM can be able to address in the first place the said OPCW-FFM report without further delay.

With this respect, we would like to emphasize that Turkey firmly supports the activities of both the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) and FFM of the OPCW. We are also closely following the work of the DAT in investigating the discrepancies of the declared chemical material and facilities of the regime.

Mr. Chairman,

We discuss the threat posed by nuclear and chemical weapons frequently and extensively. However equally threatening are conventional weapons, particularly small arms and light weapons. Due to the mass suffering they cause, these weapons are even regarded as weapons of mass destruction in many parts of the world. The illicit transfer, destabilizing accumulation, uncontrolled spread and misuse of small arms and light weapons pose a significant threat to peace and security, and to the social and economic development of many countries. There is a well-documented relationship between their illicit trade, terrorism and organized crime.

Therefore, Turkey welcomes the entry into force of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) on December 24, 2014. Since its outset, Turkey supported and actively participated in the process, thereafter signing the ATT. The First Conference of State Parties that was held in Cancun in August 2015 has been an important achievement. We would like to reaffirm the Government of Turkey’s intention to ratify the Treaty at the soonest.
Turkey will continue to actively contribute to all efforts within the UN and other fora, for the establishment of effective norms and rules aimed at eradicating illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects. We remain committed to the effective implementation and further strengthening of the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons. We were thus pleased that the 2012 Review Conference yielded results.

Mr. Chairman,

Each of the seven clusters that we will address in the First Committee deserves particular emphasis. Each challenge grouped in these clusters is our common challenge. So is the responsibility to stand up to them. We should uphold this responsibility. We hope that these deliberations will contribute to eliminate the obstacles on the way to a safer and more secure world.

I wish to conclude by reiterating our delegation’s full support and cooperation in bringing this session to a successful conclusion.

Thank you.