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African Group Statement
Delivered by His Excellency, the Permanent Representative
of Uganda to the United Nations
at
the
General Debate of the 2016 Substantive Session of the United
Nations Disarmament Commission (UNDC)
New York, 4 April, 2016

Mr. Chairman,

1. I have the honour to speak on behalf of the African Group.

2. The African Group congratulates you on your election as the Chairperson of this session of the United Nations Disarmament Commission (UNDC). The African Group seizes this opportunity to congratulate other members of the Bureau on their election, and expresses appreciation to your predecessor H.E. Fode Seck of Senegal, for his hard work as President of the 2015 Substantive Session. The Group appreciates efforts by the Chairs of the two Working Groups and looks forward to further working with them at this session. The Group also expresses appreciation to the High-Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Kim Won-soo for his thoughtful remarks.

Mr. Chairman,

3. The African Group aligns itself with the statement of the Non-Aligned Movement delivered by the distinguished Permanent Representative of Indonesia. The Group expresses its continued commitment to the principle and validity of multilateral diplomacy in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation and underlines that disarmament and proliferation issues are best addressed through multilaterally negotiated, universal, comprehensive and nondiscriminatory agreements.

4. As stressed by a former Secretary General, Kurt Waldheim, the long term reason for the necessity of multilateral disarmament is the need for the UN to effectively play its primary role of ensuring peace, security and the survival of organized life on our planet. For, there is the continued risk of total destruction to life and human civilization, as long as nuclear weapons exist. It is in view of this that the African Group wishes to underscore the importance and the relevance of the UNDC as the sole specialized deliberative body within the United Nations multilateral disarmament machinery. In the past, the UNDC has measurably contributed to deliberations on nuclear disarmament; as the highest global priority, as well as on issues related to nuclear non-proliferation, including in the adoption of guidelines, recommendations and declarations. The Group expresses regrets, however, that the UNDC has not been able to achieve a substantial outcome which would have led to concrete

recommendations in more than a decade, due to the lack of political will and inflexible positions.

5. The African Group reiterates its call for concerted efforts in addressing the threat of nuclear weapons and the total elimination of Nuclear Weapons, as the end-goal of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The Group reaffirms the application of the principles of transparency, irreversibility and verifiability by Nuclear Weapons States (NWS) in relation to nuclear disarmament measures. This principle remains essential to promoting the fulfillment of the obligations in Article VI of the NPT and in consonance with relevant multilateral legal obligations. The Group again stresses the need to universalize the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), and to ensure compliance, in a balanced and comprehensive manner, with each of its three pillars of disarmament, non-proliferation and the peaceful use of nuclear energy. It further stresses the inalienable right of States to develop research, production and the peaceful uses of nuclear energy without discrimination, and in conformity with Article IV of the NPT.

6. This year marks the 46th anniversary of the entry into force of the NPT. In this regard, the African Group regrets the inability to achieve consensus on a final outcome document of its IXth Review Conference in 2015. Such draw-back represents a missed opportunity for States Parties to strengthen the treaty, by truly reinforcing its three pillars of nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation and the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

7. The Group believes that the total elimination of nuclear weapons and a legally-binding assurance that they would never be produced again remain the only absolute guarantee against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons. The Group further wishes to affirm that, pending the conclusion of such assurances, all non-nuclear weapon States should be provided with legal assurances against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons by nuclear weapons States.

Mr. Chairman,

8. The African Group continues to stress that the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free-zones constitutes an important milestone towards achieving nuclear

disarmament and non-proliferation objectives. One of Africa's major contributions in this respect was the entry into force of the Pelindaba Treaty establishing a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Africa on 15 July 2009.

9. The Group reiterates that the entry into force of the Treaty restates the continent of Africa as a nuclear weapons-free-zone. The Group further seizes this opportunity to encourage remaining States yet to ratify, particularly the States contemplated in Protocol III, to take all necessary measures to ensure its speedy application. The Group believes such action will significantly enhance the status of the Treaty and contribute to efforts to replicate this measure in the remaining parts of the world.

10. The Group unequivocally supports the call for the establishment of a nuclear weapon-free-zone in the Middle East. It continues to express deep dissatisfaction at the failure to implement, as agreed, commitments and obligations of the 1995 resolution on the Middle East and 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. It expresses, in clear terms, its strong disappointment at the fact that the Conference on the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone and all other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East, which should have held in 2012, was not convened as mandated. In this regard, the commitments and obligations of the 1995 resolution on the Middle East, which 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 as well as related measures of the Action Plan of the 2010 NPT Review Conference remain valid until the establishment of the Zone.

Mr. Chairman,

11. The African Group wishes to highlight the goal of General Assembly resolution 70/34 entitled: "Follow-up to the High Level Meeting of the General Assembly on Nuclear Disarmament" as an integral part of the overall objective of a nuclear free world and calls for its effective implementation. The Group reiterates the need for a High-level International Conference to be convened no later than 2018. The Group believes this conference would serve as an opportunity for the General Assembly to make concrete recommendations, with a view to maintaining the

momentum of the High-level Meeting held at the GA in 2013, as well as intensify international efforts to ensure a nuclear free world.

12. Having held the nineteenth anniversary of the adoption of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) in September 2015, the African Group wishes to highlight the importance of achieving universal adherence to this instrument, bearing in mind the special responsibilities of nuclear weapon States in this regard, and to encourage the remaining Annex II States, in particular nuclear weapons States, to sign and ratify the CTBT without further delay, in order to ensure its entry into force.

13. Nuclear weapons remain the only weapons of mass destruction yet to be prohibited. They remain a present and existential threat to mankind and their use constitute a violation of the UN Charter, norms of human civilization and crime against humanity. The Group considers any doctrine justifying their use or threat of use as unacceptable and unjustifiable. It further recalls the 1996 Advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) which affirms that the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons constitutes a crime against humanity and a violation of international law, including international humanitarian law. In this context, the Group reiterates its grave concern at the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons. It further reaffirms that any use of nuclear weapons would be a violation of the Charter of the United Nations and a crime against humanity and calls on all States, particularly the nuclear weapon States, to consider such catastrophic consequences on humanity.

14. The African Group re-affirms the importance of the Conference on Disarmament (CD), not only as the single multilateral negotiating body on disarmament issues, but one which should work to unlock the impasse in nuclear disarmament negotiations. The Group reiterates its call on the urgent need for the CD to agree on a comprehensive and balanced programme of work. In this regard, the Group welcomes the efforts made by the CD in 2014 as highlighted in its final Report to the General Assembly. The Group calls on the CD to work towards the realization of the objectives for its establishment in its negotiations.

Mr. Chairman,

15. Regarding the issue of confidence-building measures (CBMs) in the field of conventional arms, the Group wishes to underline that, in pursuit of the objective to contribute to international peace and security, CBMs should be undertaken in full conformity with the United Nations Charter principles and international law.

16. The African Group wishes to further stress that illicit trade of small arms and light weapons continues to threaten peace and stability in many countries and regions, particularly in Africa. The illicit trade in small arms and light weapons remains a source of supply to terrorist groups, fuels organized crime, and remains an ongoing and major concern to Member States in this Group.

17. Having entered into force as a “legally binding instrument on the transfer of conventional arms” among its States Parties, the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) provides an opportunity to address some of the challenges of unregulated transfer of conventional weapons. The Group recognizes and reaffirms the sovereign right of all States to acquire, manufacture, export, import and retain conventional arms, their parts and components for their self defence and security needs in accordance with the UN Charter. The Group reiterates the call for its implementation in a balanced and objective manner that protects the interests of all States and not just the major international producing and exporting States and urges all major arms suppliers to accede to the treaty without further delay.

18. The Group looks forward to actively participate in the forthcoming 6th Biennial Meeting of States (BMS 6) on UN Programme of Action (UN PoA) on Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs) as a follow-up to BMS 5 held in 2014 and the Meeting of Governmental Experts held in 2015. The African Group continues to emphasize the importance of a balanced, full and effective implementation of the PoA. In this regard, the Group identifies the strengthening of the tools of international cooperation and assistance as essential ingredients that must be addressed in order to ensure the full implementation of the Programme of Action.

19. The African Group continues to highlight efforts by the UN Regional Center for Peace and Disarmament in Africa, in the context of its contributions to disarmament issues and in providing requisite assistance to member States of the African Group, in the implementation of disarmament, peace and security issues. The Group wishes to stress the need to further strengthen all UN regional centers for disarmament, to fully discharge their mandates in this regard.

20. Finally Mr. Chairman, the Group once again regrets that the Disarmament Commission has not been able to make concrete and consensus recommendations in its three previous cycles. The African Group wishes to restate the critical importance of political will and transparency in addressing international disarmament and security issues. The Group appeals for a sustained but meaningful dialogue as we begin

deliberations on major issues, and looks forward to concrete suggestions towards achieving peace and security for all.

I thank you.