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**STATEMENT DELIVERED BY  
AMBASSADOR MATJILA,  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF SOUTH AFRICA  
TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

**DURING THE GENERAL DEBATE OF THE FIRST  
COMMITTEE SESSION OF THE 71<sup>ST</sup> UNITED NATIONS  
GENERAL ASSEMBLY,**

**NEW YORK, 4 OCTOBER 2016**

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**Chairperson,**

My delegation would like to congratulate you on your appointment as Chair of the 2016 First Committee and wishes to assure you of our full support and cooperation. We further would like to associate ourselves with the statements delivered on behalf of the African Group, the Non-Aligned Movement and the New Agenda Coalition. In the interest of time, this statement will be limited to general comments on the key issues that will be covered more extensively in our national statements during the thematic debates.

**Chairperson,**

As we meet again for yet another First Committee Session, this platform provides us an opportunity to reflect on progress achieved during the past year. While we welcome the progress made in some areas, we are deeply aware of the daunting work that still remains in strengthening international security and disarmament in general. We remain concerned about the continuing impasse in the UN disarmament machinery. The 20-year stalemate in the Conference on Disarmament (CD) and the lack of agreement in the UN Disarmament Commission for many years have impacted negatively on multilateralism and the multilateral system of governance.

It is evident that the lack of progress on nuclear disarmament in particular is a source of growing frustration among the vast majority of UN Member States. Achievements in the area of nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation remain especially uneven. The regime established by the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) is constantly re-affirmed by the majority of the international community and many creative measures have been introduced to strengthen nuclear non-proliferation, yet nuclear disarmament obligations and commitments continue to be subjected to reinterpretation and further conditions. This is simply not sustainable. The argument that nuclear weapons are indispensable for the security of some States, but not for others, is not only illogical, but lacks credibility. The resistance by the States possessing

nuclear weapons to fulfil their disarmament obligations and commitments has caused serious divisions among States and created a credibility crisis in the nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation regime.

The very existence of nuclear weapons means that humanity faces the peril of a nuclear catastrophe and all States have the shared responsibility to prevent the use of such weapons under any circumstances. Together with the vast majority of States, South Africa believes that the only guarantee against the threat posed by nuclear weapons is their total elimination and the legally-binding assurances that they will never be produced again.

**Chairperson,**

The Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) of the UN General Assembly on "Taking Forward Multilateral Nuclear Disarmament Negotiations" provided an inclusive platform for us all to seek effective measures to achieve and maintain a world free of nuclear weapons. Despite concerted efforts by virtually all participants to achieve a consensus outcome, one State regrettably decided to break consensus on the report. In the end, the OEWG adopted its report by an overwhelming majority. Among other important recommendations, the report recommends to the General Assembly to convene a Conference in 2017 to commence negotiations on a Treaty prohibiting nuclear weapons. Such a treaty is a practical and achievable interim step to fill a glaring gap in the international legal architecture pertaining to the legality of nuclear weapons.

Our support for such a step would be without prejudice to the realisation of existing nuclear disarmament commitments, particularly those agreed to in the NPT context. As we approach the next Review Cycle of the NPT, it is imperative to recognise that the vitality and relevance of the Treaty, as the foundation of the nuclear non-proliferation regime, is dependent on the extent to which State Parties implement their obligations and commitments. It is not acceptable for State Parties to treat their obligations and commitments as an "a la carte menu" from which they can choose. We call upon all

States Parties to the NPT to honour their obligations and to faithfully, and without precondition, implement all commitments agreed to in 1995, 2000 and 2010 without any further delay, including the 1995 resolution on the establishment of a zone in the Middle East free from nuclear weapons and other weapon of mass destruction.

In the area of chemical weapons, South Africa welcomes the progress made by the relevant State Parties to destroy their chemical weapons stockpiles, abandoned chemical weapons and old chemical weapons. We remain deeply concerned about the reported use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic. In the area of biological weapons, South Africa looks forward to the upcoming Review Conference which we hope will achieve an outcome that would strengthen the Convention and its implementation. No cause could ever justify the use of any weapon of mass destruction, anywhere, by any actor, under any circumstances.

**Chairperson,**

Regarding conventional weapons, South Africa, as a State Party to the Anti-Personnel Mine-Ban Convention and the Convention on Cluster Munitions, will play its part on the journey towards a world free of both anti-personnel mines and cluster munitions. We encourage those States that have not yet done so, particularly those possessing such weapons, to join these instruments without delay. We call on those States in a position to do so, to assist requesting States in their national implementation efforts and to provide assistance to the victims of these weapons.

South Africa continues to believe that the UN Programme of Action on small arms and light weapons (UNPoA) represents the central, universally agreed set of undertakings to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. Apart from national implementation efforts, the full implementation of the entire UNPoA, including those provisions related to international co-operation and assistance, remains of critical importance. Likewise, we welcome the outcome of the Second Conference of

State Parties to the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) and look forward to the full implementation of the Treaty, in regulating international trade in conventional arms and in contributing towards curbing illicit transfers.

My delegation stands ready to participate actively in the work of this year's First Committee and to join you and other delegations in making a success of our work.

**I thank you.**