

## **Statement by South Africa at the General Assembly Meeting on the occasion of the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons, New York**

**30 September 2015**

Mr President,

I wish to associate my delegation with the statement delivered by the distinguished representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran, delivered on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

On behalf of the South African delegation, I would like to thank you for convening this important Meeting on the occasion of the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons. South Africa associates itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement. This year, this event coincides with important historic milestones with the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first use of nuclear weapons and the adoption of the very first General Assembly resolution devoted to the threat posed by nuclear weapons to humanity as a whole.

Mr President,

Since South Africa's first democratic election in 1994, our country has consistently supported the achievement of a world without nuclear weapons. To quote our former President Nelson Mandela when he addressed the UN General Assembly in September 1998:

"We must ask the question, which might sound naive to those who have elaborated sophisticated arguments to justify their refusal to eliminate these terrible and terrifying weapons of mass destruction — why do they need them, anyway? In reality, no rational answer can be advanced to explain in a satisfactory manner what, in the end, is the consequence of cold-war inertia and an attachment to the use of the threat of brute force to assert the primacy of some States over others."

In pursuance of the objective of achieving a more peaceful and just world free from the threat posed by nuclear weapons, South Africa has consistently promoted a pragmatic, progressive and systematic approach, including through the negotiation of an international agreement or set of mutually-reinforcing agreements, as well as other practical, unilateral, bilateral and plurilateral measures aimed at reducing and ultimately eliminating all nuclear weapons.

In 2000, South Africa together with its partners in the New Agenda Coalition (NAC) played a key role in securing agreement on the 13 practical steps for systematic and progressive efforts to implement Article VI of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Included among those steps was the "unequivocal undertaking" by the nuclear-weapon States to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals leading to nuclear disarmament, as well as the commitment to apply the principles of transparency, irreversibility and verifiability to nuclear disarmament steps.

In 2010, the Review Conference reaffirmed these undertakings and expressed “its deep concern at the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons”. Regrettably, since then, and despite our pragmatic approach, not much progress has been achieved towards the fulfilment of these obligations and solemn undertakings.

Since 2010, various activities have been undertaken reminding the international community of the catastrophic consequences and risks of nuclear weapons, and the consequent need for urgent progress towards nuclear disarmament. In this context, South Africa played an active role in the three international conferences on this subject hosted by Norway (2013), Mexico and Austria (2014), as well as various joint statements delivered on behalf of the overwhelming majority of UN Member States at various fora, including the First Committee.

At the 2014 NPT Preparatory Committee, the New Agenda Coalition submitted a working paper on effective measures towards the implementation of Article VI of the NPT. This working paper not only contained a detailed list of proposals ranging from a ban on nuclear weapons and a nuclear weapons convention to the more limited measures already agreed to as part of the so-called step-by-step approach, but also included suggestions for a framework agreement that may provide a bridge between the different approaches.

Mr President,

The renewed focus on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons has reinvigorated the debate on nuclear disarmament by emphasising that a nuclear war would affect all of humanity and that nuclear disarmament is therefore not only the business of those possessing these terrible weapons. This has ensured that the discussion is no longer confined to the security interests of a handful of States and their allies without equal recognition to the right of all States to enjoy the “freedom from fear” envisaged in the UN Charter – or where the security of the few should come at the expense of the security of all. The discussions on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons has underlined the urgency of progress in fulfilling the unequivocal undertaking of the nuclear-weapon States towards the total elimination of all nuclear weapons. In addition, it also raised serious questions about the effectiveness of policy responses to date.

South Africa stands ready to play its part towards achieving the total elimination of all nuclear weapons, including through the elaboration of effective measures aimed at accelerating the implementation of nuclear disarmament obligations and commitments.

I thank you, Mr President.