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STATEMENT

BY
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AT THE GENERAL DEBATE
OF
THE 2008 SUBSTANTIVE SESSION OF THE UNITED
NATIONS DISARMAMENT COMMISSION
ON BEHALF OF THE AFRICAN GROUP

New York, 7 April 2008
(Please Check Against Delivery)

Mr. Chairman,

On behalf of the African Group, I would like to join all the previous speakers in congratulating you upon your assumption of the Chairmanship of the 2008 session of the Disarmament Commission. We congratulate also other members of the Bureau and the Chairs of the Working Groups on their elections. We are confident that under your capable guidance and leadership, this session of the Commission will achieve fruitful results. We hereby assure you of our full support and collaboration.

The African Group would like to take this opportunity to express its gratitude to the Office of Disarmament Affairs for their continued service to member states, in promoting the cause of global disarmament and universal peace.

While agreeing with the position of the Non Aligned Movement, the African Group emphasizes the importance of the Disarmament Commission as a deliberative body that examines and discusses specific issues in the field of disarmament, and, makes recommendations to the General Assembly. Based on this, the Group considers that the current session of the Commission is very relevant in terms of the overall objective of general and complete disarmament under effective international control. We, therefore, expect useful recommendations to emerge from this session.

The African Group reaffirms its absolute commitment to multilateral diplomacy. It believes strongly in the promotion of multilateralism in the field of disarmament as an essential way to strengthen universal peace and security, as well as in the pursuit of our common interests in this area. The African Group joins other member states of the Non-Aligned Movement in expressing deep concern at the growing resort to unilateralism in addressing issues of multilateral interest.

We, in the African Group, share the view that nuclear weapons pose a great threat to international peace and security, and that the most effective means of achieving nuclear disarmament should be the commencement of multilateral negotiations leading to an early conclusion of a convention prohibiting the development, production, testing, deployment, stockpiling, transfer, threat or use of nuclear weapons and on their total elimination.

We reiterate that the principal of this objective should be a commitment by nuclear-weapon States to immediately stop the qualitative improvement, development, production and stocking of nuclear warheads and their delivery systems.

Pending the total elimination of those nuclear weapons, a legally binding international instrument should be established under which the nuclear-weapons States would undertake not to be the first to use nuclear weapons, and also, not to use or threaten to use, nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-States. The African Group stresses the importance of ensuring that an meaningful nuclear disarmament process should be irreversible, transparent and verifiable.

Mr. Chairman,

The African Group notes the cardinal role played by the Conference on Disarmament as the only multilateral negotiating forum on disarmament.

We reaffirm that the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (N.P.T.) is a vital instrument in the maintenance of international peace and security.

The African Group emphasizes the importance of consolidating the existing nuclear-weapon-free zones and the establishment of new nuclear-weapon-free zones on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at among the States of the region concerned. Nuclear weapon-free zones play indeed an important role in the maintenance of regional peace and security.

The African Group welcomes all efforts at establishing a nuclear weapon-free zone in the Middle East. The Group calls upon countries in the region to take practical and urgent steps for the full operationalization of such zone.

Mr. Chairman,

Concerning item 2 of the agenda on confidence-building measures, the African Group remains convinced that the ultimate goal of such measures in the field of conventional arms is to strengthen international peace and security and to contribute to the prevention of war. Practical confidence-building measures in the field of conventional arms should fully respect the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

The African Group notes with concern the recent trend of rising global military expenditures. The Group believes that reduction of military budgets is an important confidence-building measure that can contribute to global peace and security.

We are further deeply concerned about the illicit transfer, manufacture and circulation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) and about their excessive accumulation and uncontrolled spread in many regions of the world, especially in Africa.

In this connection we wish to welcome the ongoing Group of Experts on SALW. We hereby call upon all Member States to give the group their utmost support in order to enable it fashion a reliable universal instrument on SALW.

Finally, **Mr. Chairman**, the African Group calls for frank and genuine efforts by all groups aimed at reaching consensus with a view to making our world a better and safer place for us and our posterity to live.

I thank you for your attention.