



**TENTH REVIEW CONFERENCE OF THE TREATY ON THE NON-
PROLIFERATION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS (NPT)**

SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL STATEMENT FOR THE GENERAL DEBATE

Mr President,

It is an honour to finally congratulate you on your assumption of the Presidency of the 10th Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). We also congratulate the other members of the Bureau on the assumption of their important positions. The numerous postponements of this important Conference over the past 2 years has indeed been challenging but we are now finally here, which highlights that the international community needs to cooperate and work together in the current trying global environment. Please be assured of my delegation's full co-operation and assistance in our shared quest to review and strengthen the implementation of the NPT.

My delegation also associates itself with the statements delivered by the African Group, the Non-Aligned Movement and the New Agenda Coalition, respectively.

Mr President,

During March 2020, we marked the 50th Anniversary of the NPT. On this occasion, we heard from all quarters the strong global support for the Treaty and expressions of commitment to it. Emphasis was placed on the Treaty being the cornerstone of the global nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation architecture, and the framework for international cooperation in sharing the benefits of the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, science, and technology.

While the Treaty remains an invaluable instrument in contributing to international peace and security, the long-term viability of the Treaty cannot be taken for granted.

Its successful implementation lies in the hands of its States Parties, specifically how they fulfil their obligations and responsibilities.

This Conference closes the tenth review cycle of the NPT, which is also the fifth strengthened review cycle since the adoption of the 1995 package of decisions, that extended the Treaty indefinitely, including an enhanced mechanism for reviewing its implementation in all its aspects.

During this Review Conference, States Parties have the opportunity to translate words into concrete actions. It will therefore be important to not only do a comprehensive review and assessment of the current status of the Treaty, but also of the progress made during the period under review. We further need to agree on actions that are worthy of the Treaty's objectives and through such efforts look ahead towards the next review cycle. However, this would only be possible if we preserve the integrity and credibility of the Treaty.

Mr President,

My delegation wishes to reiterate South Africa's commitment to the attainment and maintenance of a world free of nuclear weapons. In this context, we are committed to the Treaty and its three equally important pillars, namely nuclear disarmament, nuclear non-proliferation and the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

During the next four weeks, we will be assessing how successful we were in advancing the Treaty's provisions over the past six years. South Africa, therefore, calls upon all States Parties to seize the opportunity of this Tenth Review Conference to genuinely search for common ground to achieve a consensus outcome and provide renewed impetus to the implementation of the NPT and reinvigorating it - and this Treaty does need reinvigorating.

There continues to be an implementation gap between the disarmament and non-proliferation obligations which destroys confidence in the grand bargain between nuclear-weapon States and non-nuclear-weapon States. This poses a significant threat that is slowly but surely destroying the Treaty's integrity.

While we have a body of consensus, ample frameworks, implementation is lacking. The 1995, 2000, and 2010 commitments have largely been unfulfilled but remain valid until fully implemented. The Final Document of the 2010 Review Conference contained

an extensive Action Plan under all three Treaty pillars which, in a very concrete way, illustrated the continued commitment of States Parties to the Treaty.

However, agreement on the 2010 Final Document was by no means a recognition that States Parties were satisfied with the progress made in the implementation of past agreements or that confidence among States Parties had been restored. In fact, most States Parties remain seriously concerned about the lack of urgency and seriousness with which these solemn undertakings, particularly in respect of nuclear disarmament, continue to be approached.

The reinterpretation, backtracking, and complete abandonment of these commitments would reflect a lack of integrity and disrespect for the NPT process and cast doubt on the value of new commitments and the process itself. For this reason, South Africa believes that the success of this or any other Review Conference will be determined by the extent to which these undertakings are practically implemented.

Mr President,

Undeniably, there is frustration about the slow pace of progress on the nuclear disarmament pillar. South Africa maintains its long-held view that nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation are mutually reinforcing processes: progress in respect of both is therefore essential to realise the object and purpose of the NPT.

However, while non-proliferation measures have been strengthened, similar concrete progress has not yet been realised in the area of nuclear disarmament. We believe that efforts to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons should be matched by the concurrent effort to eliminate all nuclear weapons, in a transparent, verifiable and irreversible manner. In South Africa's view, non-compliance with the NPT's disarmament obligations remains the most significant threat to the Treaty's integrity and equally so, to humanity.

Mr President,

Former South African President Nelson Mandela implored nuclear powers to follow South Africa's lead in relinquishing nuclear weapons. He abhorred the double standards, deeply entrenched in today's international order, whereby certain nations claim a "right" to possess nuclear arms while simultaneously condemning, and feigning moral outrage towards those who dare pursue the same. Despite President

Mandela's unwavering moral authority and powers of persuasion, his appeal for disarmament went unheeded in his lifetime.

During this meeting we would hear a number of arguments on the current security environment not being conducive for nuclear disarmament. In this regard, we are convinced that the current security environment allows no room for procrastination. Humanity cannot afford to wait for the "right time" before doing away with nuclear weapons.

The modernisation programmes and policy postures by nuclear-weapon States signal the reluctance to get rid of these weapons in the foreseeable future and increases the role of nuclear weapons in their security doctrines, with the adverse effect of reversing the positive gains in the reduction in the number of nuclear weapons as compared to Cold-War highs and thus undermining the credibility of the NPT.

The nuclear-weapon States are not alone in bearing responsibility for reducing the role of nuclear weapons in security strategies. States under the nuclear umbrella exacerbate the situation with their continued advocacy of the benefits of deterrence and therefore encourage the on-going possession of nuclear weapons. Any justifications for retaining such weapons amounts to proliferation and purposely undermining the very Treaty that they claim to uphold. It must be restated that building security on nuclear deterrence is not sustainable. When nuclear deterrence fails, it will fail with catastrophic effects for all of humanity.

Nuclear risk reduction measures could help to pave the way towards nuclear disarmament. In South Africa's view it needs to be reiterated that the retention of nuclear weapons themselves pose an inherent risk in addition to the catastrophic consequences of a detonation, whether deliberate or accidental.

Any risk reduction measure must not be addressed minimally in terms of nuclear-weapon States providing political signals and holding dialogues amongst themselves or creating the environment for nuclear disarmament. Nor should it be that non-nuclear weapon States have to work on transparency and confidence-building measures to improve predictability. Nuclear-weapon States bear a special responsibility to reduce the risks associated with nuclear weapons, however, given that these risks directly affect all States, there is a shared interest in risk reduction. In addition, it must be emphasised that among the non-nuclear-weapon States there should also be a special

role in these initiatives for States that maintain a role for nuclear weapons in their military doctrines.

Mr President,

Since the Treaty is meant to contribute to international peace and security, it must be reemphasised that each article of the NPT is binding on all States parties at all times and in all circumstances, without exception.

States which argue that the global security environment is not conducive for disarmament are the same States that are walking back previous commitments meant to address these very concerns. The NPT obligations and previous commitments need to be urgently implemented. The only way to guarantee the security we all seek, is through the total elimination of nuclear weapons and their prohibition. I must reiterate that there is no conditionality in the implementation of the Treaty.

Mr President,

The full implementation of the NPT and all its articles require additional complementary legal instruments.

South Africa continues to call on all States, including the eight remaining States listed in Annex 2 to the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) that have not yet signed and/or ratified the Treaty, to do so without conditions, and to work towards the Treaty's entry into force. Pending its entry into force, South Africa urges States to adhere to the nuclear testing moratorium.

For South Africa, humanitarian imperatives continue to underpin our search for a world without the threat posed by the possession, use and proliferation of nuclear weapons. These considerations are today a fundamental and global concern that should be at the core of our deliberations, actions and decisions on nuclear weapons.

We therefore consider deliberations towards a Treaty addressing the elimination of fissile material for nuclear weapons, including past stockpiles, as an indispensable instrument and requirement towards the total elimination of nuclear weapons.

The humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons cannot be overemphasized thus, it is important to acknowledge the historical moment of the coming into force of the

Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) in January 2021, as well as, its first meeting of States Parties which took place in June this year.

Quoting South African Nobel Peace Laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu, “Disarmament is not an option for governments to take up or ignore. It is a moral duty owed by them to their own citizens, and to humanity as a whole. We must not await another Hiroshima or Nagasaki before finally mustering the political will to banish these weapons from global arsenals.”

We must recognize that this Treaty is the democratic wish of the overwhelming majority of UN Member States and the people of the world. The momentum is therefore unstoppable.

No longer are the world’s people willing to be held hostage to the unspeakable terror of these weapons. The TPNW’s intention is to stigmatize and delegitimize nuclear weapons based on the adverse and indefensible humanitarian consequences of their use. Therefore, this Treaty goes hand-in-hand with the intention of the NPT and must be part of the Review Conference’s outcome.

Mr President,

Emerging non-proliferation challenges remain a concern, such as the trilateral partnership — known as AUKUS — that was announced in September 2021. AUKUS could be a destabilising factor obstructing nuclear disarmament and prompting an arms race. We therefore need to be provided with enough specific information as to what it will entail in order to make informed decisions regarding this emerging matter.

South Africa supports the inalienable right of nations to pursue the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. In this regard, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) strengthened this principle within a strict environment of safeguards and the verification of Iran’s nuclear facilities.

The global non-proliferation regime is weaker without a fully functioning JCPOA, and it is crucial that it be restored. South Africa welcomes the talks which took place in June this year in Qatar as well as the previous talks in this regard, and want to express, not only our full support for the talks, but also the fervent hope that these talks would be fruitful and directly contribute to the full restoration of the JCPOA. We reiterate our view that the success or failure of the JCPOA is a matter of global consequence.

Mr President

It remains South Africa's principled position that, the obligation of States Parties to accept safeguards as required under Article III of the Treaty is sacrosanct.

South Africa has consistently expressed support for measures that would strengthen the safeguards system with a view to addressing the serious challenge posed by the proliferation of nuclear weapons. We therefore actively participate in the discussions, consultations and decisions on improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the safeguards system in the IAEA policy making bodies.

Safeguards contribute to mutual confidence in the peaceful nature of a State's nuclear activities and the absence of undeclared nuclear activities or material, which in turn should facilitate the transfer of nuclear technology and use of nuclear energy to the benefit of developing countries.

My delegation is therefore encouraged by the progress that has been made since 2015 in terms of the number of States that have now concluded Comprehensive Safeguards Agreements and Additional Protocols.

South Africa further reiterates its full confidence in the IAEA as the only internationally recognized competent authority responsible for verifying and assuring compliance with the safeguards agreements of States Parties.

Mr President,

One of the core reasons for the existence of the IAEA is to assist Member States to reap the benefits of nuclear technology. All humanity should be able to utilise the technology for socio-economic development in support of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Peaceful nuclear co-operation and access to the benefits of the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, constitutes one of the core objectives of the Treaty.

Nuclear power and the peaceful applications of nuclear technology, if optimised to the fullest, can meaningfully enhance the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The inalienable right of the peaceful use of nuclear technology is of particular importance in attaining sustainable and accelerated economic growth, particularly, in Africa.

South Africa attaches great importance to the IAEA's Technical Cooperation Programme which contributes towards addressing the socio-economic needs and sustainable development challenges of developing countries. The Technical Cooperation Programme is also a mechanism which enables the Agency to meet its statutory objective of accelerating and enlarging the contribution of atomic energy to peace, health and prosperity throughout the world. Sufficient, assured and predictable Technical Cooperation funding therefore remains a priority.

Mr President,

Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones play an important role in preventing the proliferation - both vertically and horizontally - of nuclear weapons and reaffirms the view that the establishment of internationally recognized Nuclear-Weapon-Free zones on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at among the States of the region concerned, enhances global and regional peace and security and constitutes an important step to strengthen the nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation regime.

South Africa is a State Party to the African Nuclear Weapons Free Zone Treaty, known as the Pelindaba Treaty, that seeks to prevent the development, manufacturing or stationing of nuclear explosives devices, prohibit the testing of nuclear weapons, and the dumping of radioactive waste on the African Continent thus fostering progress towards a world free of nuclear weapons. For the purpose of ensuring compliance with the obligations under the treaty, the African Commission on Nuclear Energy (AFCONE) was established. AFCONE continues to engage in multilateral cooperative arrangements to advance the utilisation of nuclear technology for peaceful development purposes as well as the three pillars of the NPT in Africa and by extension throughout the world.

South Africa maintains its position on the establishment of a Middle East zone free from all weapons of mass destruction and the implementation of the 1995 NPT resolution, which is an integral element of the package of decisions that led to the indefinite extension of the Treaty in 1995. South Africa welcomes the convening of the two sessions, in 2019 and 2021, of the Conference on Middle East zone free from all weapons of mass destruction and supports any agreed modalities towards achieving this goal.

In conclusion, Mr President,

South Africa supports the full implementation of the NPT and its universality in pursuit of the goal of achieving and maintaining a world entirely free from nuclear weapons. The strength, credibility and vitality of the NPT rests on a fundamental bargain across its three pillars, which must be recognized and upheld.

Thank you.