Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations Office and Other International Organizations in Geneva, Ambassador Gennady Gatilov at the plenary session of the Conference on Disarmament

23 January 2024, Geneva

Dear Mr. President,
Dear colleagues,

First of all I would like to congratulate you, your Excellency, on the beginning of your presidency at the Conference. I wish you and your team every success in leading our forum. You can count on a comprehensive support of the Russian delegation in this endeavour.

Mr. President,

Over the past year, the negative trends of the last decade have become even more distinct. Countries of the “collective West” led by the US are increasingly resisting the objective and irreversible process of transition to a multipolar world order. This is accompanied by the aggravation of long-standing crises and emergence of new large-scale ones, caused by the desire of Western States to impose the concept of a so-called “rules-based world order” as the sole foundation of modern global setup, in violation of fundamental norms and principles of international law. The latest round of tensions in the Middle East, which has already resulted in a huge number of civilian casualties, primarily in Gaza, is another indication of this state of affairs.

As far as international security is concerned, the confrontational approach of Western countries has manifested itself in attempts to gain political and military superiority. To achieve this goal, they have dealt a devastating blow to the system of international treaties in the field of arms control, disarmament and
non-proliferation, and have taken steps to destabilize the activities of such authoritative international organizations as the OPCW and IAEA. In the first case, these actions led to the transformation of the Organization into a political tool of the “collective West”.

In order to gain decisive military-strategic superiority, Washington, actively supported by its allies, has over the past years, effectively dismantled the agreements in the sphere of arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation. This goal has been achieved either through unilateral withdrawal from treaties (such as the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty and the Open Skies Treaty) or by creating unacceptable conditions for the fulfillment of such agreements by their parties, as it happened with the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe and the New START. The consequence of it was not just the destruction of basic “disarmament” regimes and mechanisms serving to maintain peace and security, but also an even greater destabilization of the military-strategic as well as military-political situation in the world.

At the same time, and this should be emphasized, the actions of the Russian Federation in this domain have always been tit-for-tat responses, carried out in compliance with its existing obligations, and aimed solely at neutralizing threats arising from the destructive line of the “collective West”. This is how one should regard our State’s withdrawal of its CTBT ratification or the decision to deploy nuclear weapons on the territory of the Republic of Belarus, which is part of the Union State with the Russian Federation and shares a common security space with our country.

With the U.S. and its allies refusing any joint efforts to stabilize the strategic sphere, Russia is forced to follow a measured and pragmatic approach in order to ensure at least a minimum level of predictability and restraint. Thus, we continue to adhere to the quantitative limitations in accordance with the New START and a moratorium on deployment of ground-based intermediate-range missiles which was announced four years ago. However, due to the US policy of
ensuring its military superiority, the possibilities for maintaining this course are steadily diminishing.

Mr. President,

We regret to observe the coordinated attempts by Western States to undermine multilateral disarmament mechanisms and to obstruct the resolution of pressing issues in the area of arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation. We consider their attempts to politicize the activities of the disarmament “triad”, of which the Conference on Disarmament (CD) remains an essential element, to be unacceptable. We also find inadmissible their attempts to reduce discussions of significant global peace and security issues on its agenda to country-specific narratives, to use this unique and once effective forum to advance their narrow group interests.

The Russian Federation is convinced that the Conference remains a promising and optimal platform for discussing current issues of international security with a specific goad to develop new multilateral treaties in the field of arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation. We believe that it is necessary to make every effort to normalize the CD activities and ensure the fulfillment of its negotiating mandate on the key issues of the agreed agenda. Among other things, issues critical for global and regional security – nuclear disarmament, prevention of nuclear war, prevention of an arms race in outer space (PAROS) and negative security assurances (NSA) – require special attention.

Mr. President,

We would like to reaffirm full commitment of our State to the obligations under Article VI of the NPT, where the goal of achieving a world without nuclear weapons is set in the context of general and complete disarmament. We believe that nuclear disarmament should be carried out gradually, based on consensus, and in such a way that the relevant steps do not undermine security of any State and at the same time lead to the strengthening of international stability, peace and security for all.
We are convinced, and we have said this many times, that any alternatives proposed to circumvent the NPT in the area of nuclear disarmament are counterproductive. Now, more than ever, it is necessary to consolidate the efforts of the entire international community to create a favourable “disarmament climate”. This implies active participation of all States, including non-nuclear ones, capable of making a constructive contribution to reducing international tension and to restore trust among the States.

Mr. President,

The most acute strategic risks are currently posed by the US and NATO's escalation of the Ukrainian crisis, which threatens to turn into a direct military confrontation between nuclear powers with catastrophic consequences. Russia adheres to the understanding developed back in the 1980s that a nuclear war can never be won and must never be fought. We would like to remind it that this fundamental stance was reaffirmed upon Russia's initiative in the Joint Statement of the Leaders of the Five Nuclear-Weapon States on Preventing Nuclear War and Avoiding Arms Races of 3 January 2022. We call on all P5 States to fulfill the commitments taken in accordance with the Statement.

In light of the aforesaid, we believe it is important in the work of the Conference that in addition to nuclear disarmament, heightened attention be paid to agenda item 2 “Prevention of nuclear war, including all related matters”. It is necessary to consider the entire complex of issues associated with the causes, risks, and consequences of irresponsible behaviour by States, which could lead to irreversible and dreadful developments for the entire world.

Mr. President,

We share the common sentiment of recent years for initiating substantive discussions on negative security assurances to non-nuclear States. In case the Programme of work of the CD is adopted, which includes resuming the negotiation process, we are ready to actively contribute to the development of a unified multilateral agreement on this matter.
However, it would be wrong to assert that non-nuclear States legally remain unprotected against hypothetical threats related to the use of nuclear weapons. Besides the commitments stemming from the NPT, the nuclear States have taken additional legal obligations regarding negative security assurances within the framework of treaties on nuclear-weapon-free zones (NWFZs). Thus, Russia has given to more than a hundred States participating in these NWFZs strong legal guarantees against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons.

We advocate for expansion of NWFZs in the context of addressing security guarantees, which naturally makes sense only with responsible behaviour from both nuclear and non-nuclear States.

Meanwhile, we are convinced that in considering the issue of negative security assurances, one cannot ignore the phenomenon of non-nuclear States betting on “positive” nuclear security assurances from the US and nuclear bloc NATO. In recent years, this phenomenon has taken on a new dimension, as non-nuclear-weapon States have become widely involved in new regional military blocs with a nuclear element. In this regard, the risks and possible threats emanating from the evolution of AUKUS and the rapidly gaining momentum of trilateral military-technical cooperation between the United States, Japan, and South Korea require very serious analysis. It is evident that the desire of more than 30 non-nuclear States to ensure their own security and advance their interests under the protection of the strategic arsenals of their patrons only justifies the latter's modernization and expansion of their nuclear capabilities. This creates not only insurmountable obstacles for resuming serious and comprehensive talks on nuclear disarmament, but also provokes a nuclear arms race.

Mr. President,

Currently, the primary objective is to maintain outer space as a weapon-free zone. This is particularly crucial especially in light of the actions of Western States that are building up their force capabilities under the pretext of protecting their property and ensuring the security of their activities in outer space to the
detriment of the interests of other participants of space activities. We even more often hear voices from some Western countries about a possibility to exploit the concept of deterrence from the nuclear sphere to outer space. This makes one think about the preparation of these States for forceful and hostile actions in space.

One of the key priorities of the CD, from our perspective, is the development of a long overdue international treaty prohibiting the deployment of any weapons in outer space and the use of force or the threat of force against space objects or with their use.

In this context, we attach special importance to the activities of the Group of Governmental Experts established by the UNGA Resolution 77/250 on further measures to prevent an arms race in outer space, which is tasked with elaborating recommendations for a future legally binding instrument on PAROS. We also expect that its findings will form the basis for the new Open-Ended Working Group created by the UNGA Resolution 78/238. With the adoption of these resolutions, we have managed to create a foundation for continuity and consistent work on developing a multilateral legally binding agreement on PAROS under the circumstances when the relevant CD work is being blocked by Western CD Member States.

Mr. President,

We believe that the initiative to develop an International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Chemical and Biological Terrorism at the CD remains relevant today. The Convention is intended to eliminate gaps in international law that do not allow for a prompt and effective response to the qualitatively new threat of WMD terrorism, which is acquiring an increasingly large-scale, systemic and transboundary character. Such work could, among other things, become a real means of overcoming the stagnation in the substantive activities of the CD.

Mr. President,
Our delegation reaffirms its readiness for dialogue and search for compromise solutions to agree on a comprehensive and balanced Work Programme of the CD, which would take into account the priorities of all Member States of the forum. We believe that possible decisions on organizing the activities of the Conference should involve negotiations or, at the very least, preparations for negotiations on the main agenda items.

We see the idea of establishing subsidiary bodies as promising, with the understanding, however, that they have a clear mandate, their work yields concrete results and thereby creates conditions for initiating the negotiation process.

Mr. President,

We consistently advocate for ensuring the principles of inclusivity and multilateralism in the work of the CD. All States wishing to contribute to it should have the opportunity to do so. However, there are well-known negative precedents of past years when observers simply abused the trust granted to them, using the CD platform to politicize its work, promote Western political stances and make unfounded accusations against CD Member States. All candidates for observer status must be aware that their participation in the Conference is supposed to help resolve existing problems and contribute to the constructive consideration of the agenda items. Otherwise, their involvement in the work of the CD would be counterproductive.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that Russia is ready to participate actively in the discussion of topical issues on the disarmament agenda and to conduct negotiations aimed at developing new agreements that meet the interests of the entire international community. Such work should be based on true equality, mutual respect, and the consideration of the legitimate security interests of all parties. It should focus on resolving existing problems, mitigating and eliminating new challenges and threats, rather than implementing national or
narrow-group foreign policy positions, gaining preferences, and securing one's own interests at the expense of other States.

I would like to reiterate the Russian delegation's readiness for constructive interaction with the Indian Presidency and all subsequent Presidencies of the CD session in 2024, as well as with the Member States of the forum and invited observers.

Thank you for your attention.