



STATEMENT BY SOUTH AFRICA

**AT THE GENERAL DEBATE OF THE 80th SESSION OF THE FIRST COMMITTEE OF
THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY (UNGA80)**

8 OCTOBER 2025

Ambassador Maurizio Massari, please accept my congratulations on your appointment as the Chairperson of the 80th Session of the First Committee and be assured of South Africa's full support and cooperation during this session.

South Africa aligns itself with the statements delivered on behalf of the African Group, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the New Agenda Coalition (NAC).

Chairperson,

As we mark the 80th year since the United Nations arose out of the devastation of a global conflict, we recall its establishment to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war with all of us pledging to uphold peace, development and human rights underpinned by international law. Yet, we continue to witness persistent challenges in the domain of disarmament and international security, while there has been a rise in the emergence of new threats with alarming frequency.

The Secretary-General's report that global military expenditure has reached historic highs should be of critical concern to this Committee. The relevance of the United Nations and multilateral processes for the maintenance of international peace and security are being undermined. How do we build consensus on principles for stability and security, promoting cooperation and the reduction of armaments when States are building more and more weapons and fighting wars that causes untold death and destruction.

We remain gravely concerned about the ongoing and protracted nature of conflicts on the African continent, particularly in Sudan, as well as in Ukraine, the Occupied Palestinian Territory and other affected regions. These conflicts continue to have devastating humanitarian consequences on civilians, especially women and children.

It is a matter of grave concern that these conflicts remain unresolved for a longer period of time since they started and the methods used in these conflicts violates international law, reverse long established norms on disarmament and undermine the progress that has been made in the negotiations and the implementation of the UN Resolutions.

As the humanitarian situation in Gaza continues to deteriorate, we support the continued and urgent calls from UN Member States and the international community for a ceasefire in Gaza. South Africa calls upon those who have influence over Israel to go beyond mere condemnation and exert pressure on the country's leaders to stop the unnecessary bloodshed. All UN Member States have an obligation to put an end to the suffering of the people of Gaza in accordance with the provisions of the Charter of the UN, which we, as Member States, have committed to uphold.

Accordingly, we call on the international community to halt the transfer of weapons, parts and ammunition to parties to the conflict as these are at risk of being used to commit violations of International Humanitarian Law (IHL). The unconditional transfer and sale of weapons, parts and ammunition by governments, where there is clear risk of use in harming civilians and violating international law has enabled the violence and indiscriminate killing of civilians to continue unabated.

Chairperson,

The rising threat to international peace and security given the current intensifying geopolitical tensions among nuclear powers is a source of deep concern for South Africa. Similarly, the risk of the threat of use of nuclear weapons which seems to be gaining traction, remains worrying

South Africa has maintained that the total elimination of all weapons of mass destruction is essential in advancing international peace and security hence it remains one of our key foreign policy priorities.

We remain steadfast in our conviction that nuclear weapons do not guarantee security but rather detracts from it. Simultaneously, we underscore the importance of nuclear security and safety and the central role of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in strengthening and coordinating the respective nuclear security and safety frameworks globally. In this regard, we firmly believe that it remains pivotal that the work of this body is not politicised and that the conduct of IAEA officials must always be transparent and not detract from the important and competent technical responsibilities that the Agency is seized with.

Chairperson,

Another worrying development is the unprovoked military attacks on Iranian nuclear facilities in June this year (2025). In this regard, South Africa would like to reiterate its position that this act is not only a fundamental attack on international law, including the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity but a dangerous escalation to tension in the

Middle East region and a direct threat to international peace and security. South Africa's view is that military attacks against peaceful nuclear facilities are a violation of the UN Charter and international law which is affirmed in General Conference resolutions 444 of 1985 and 533 of 1990.

In South Africa's assessment, the increased emphasis on nuclear weapons in managing some States' security is incompatible with the broader approach to a non-proliferation regime and does not contribute to the strengthening of international security for all. Arguments in favour of nuclear deterrence, are tantamount to arguments promoting the proliferation of nuclear weapons. Such problematic arguments not only stall progress on nuclear disarmament but prevent us from achieving our desired goal of a nuclear weapon free world, which our Leaders committed to in the Pact of the Future adopted on 22 September 2024.

The continued possession of nuclear weapons by a few States, in total disregard to the safety and security of humanity, poses an inherent threat of the use and testing of nuclear weapons. It further undermines the goal to eliminate "the danger of a nuclear war", that our Leaders also committed to in the Pact of the Future. At its most basic level, this requires States to earnestly abide by their obligations to international instruments and to honour their bilateral commitments. It is necessary for nuclear-weapon States (NWS) to stabilise geopolitical relations by renewing trust between them, having forthright engagement and fulfil their unequivocal commitment to the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals by applying the principles of transparency, irreversibility and verification.

Chairperson,

The Third Preparatory Committee for the 11th Review Conference to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) has once again revealed that there is a crisis of credibility confronting the NPT, given the failure to abide by the "grand bargain", which underpins the Treaty. Not only are nuclear-weapon States failing to make any progress on their nuclear disarmament obligations and commitments, they have also continued to roll back and attempt to reinterpret them. In the same vein, the nuclear-weapon States and the nuclear umbrella States continued to endeavour to advocate for restrictions on the peaceful uses of nuclear technology, in contravention of the inalienable right of non-nuclear-weapon States (NNWS) in this regard. South Africa is of the view that the continued paralysis of the NPT review process must be addressed through the faithful implementation of nuclear disarmament obligations and commitments.

Chairperson,

South Africa reiterates that the entry-into-force of the historic Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) signifies one of the most important milestones towards the elimination of nuclear weapons since 1946.

The TPNW is the culmination of the humanitarian initiative on nuclear weapons, which is underpinned by the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of a nuclear weapon detonation, based on scientific evidence from the use and testing of nuclear weapons.

This effort is aimed at rallying the international community around the imperative and urgency to make progress towards nuclear disarmament and ultimately achieving the goal of eliminating the existential threat posed by nuclear weapons.

South Africa will be presiding over the First Review Conference of the TPNW taking place in 2026 and welcomes the latest States that have signed and ratified the Treaty, taking the total to 99 States bringing the numbers of those who signed, ratified or acceded into the global majority. The TPNW reaffirms that there is no greater assurance of non-proliferation than the complete prohibition of nuclear weapons.

Chairperson,

After 80 years of nuclear testing and the legacy of humanitarian catastrophe that was left by the more than 2000 nuclear explosions, it is deeply concerning that almost three (3) decades since the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) was open for signature, the Treaty is yet to enter into force. For South Africa, the Treaty remains an important element of the set of mutually reinforcing instruments aimed at accomplishing our common goals of nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation. The recent developments that weaken the norm against nuclear testing are worrying and necessitate concerted efforts for the early entry-into-force of the CTBT. We therefore call on all Annex II States that have yet to take the requisite steps to sign and ratify this Treaty and to do so without further delay nor preconditions.

Chairperson,

The critical role played by Nuclear-Weapons-Free Zones (NWFZ) in safeguarding States against the scourge of nuclear weapons; enhancing regional and global peace and security; and contributing to nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation efforts cannot be overstated. South Africa is a proud State Party to the African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty (Treaty of Pelindaba) and remains committed to its full and effective implementation.

In view of the continued importance of power and non-power applications of nuclear energy, nuclear-weapon-free zone treaties also play an important role in promoting regional and subregional programmes for co-operation in the peaceful uses of nuclear science and technology.

Regarding the nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East, it must be emphasised that the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference's Middle East resolution and relevant agreements at subsequent Review Conferences remain valid until fully implemented. We would like to restate that the establishment of a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in the Middle East is an issue of special interest for Africa as such a zone will extend the Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in Africa, establishing a contiguous zone free of nuclear weapons. South Africa welcomes the convening of the Fifth Session of the United Nations Conference on the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction pursuant to UNGA Decision 73/546. My delegation calls on all invited States to continue to constructively negotiate in good faith towards a

legally-binding treaty that satisfies the implementation of the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference resolution on the Middle East.

Furthermore, it is imperative for Israel to participate in the Conference on the establishment of a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in the Middle East, to join the NPT as a non-nuclear-weapon State and to place all its nuclear materials and facilities under IAEA comprehensive safeguards.

South Africa also calls for the establishment of NWFZs in other regions of the world, where such zones are yet to be established. In view of the numerous references, we have heard during this session of the First Committee to the prevailing security environment and current conflict in Europe, South Africa encourages States from that region to work towards the establishment of such a nuclear-weapons-free-zone.

Chairperson,

South Africa reiterates her unwavering commitment to the *Chemical Weapons Convention* (CWC) and remains dedicated to the full, effective and non-discriminatory implementation of all the provisions on the Convention. South Africa condemns the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere and under any circumstances.

South Africa welcomes the progress made towards the complete destruction of all declared stockpiles of chemical weapons and emphasise the need to finalise this process and prevent the re-emergence of chemical weapons. However, as long as there are States that remain outside the CWC, the world will continue to live under the spectre of the threat of chemical use by such States. The universalisation of the CWC should therefore remain a priority.

The potential for non-state actors to acquire or use chemical, biological or nuclear weapons, compounded by the illicit trade of WMD related material and technologies, which could assist non-state actors in acquiring such capabilities, remain a threat to the international peace and security. South Africa therefore supports the Open-Ended Working Group on Terrorism, which forms the nucleus of efforts by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in addressing the growing risk of chemical terrorism, through identifying and addressing potential gaps in the organisation's approaches to countering chemical terrorism.

Regarding the elimination of Syria's chemical weapons programme, South Africa notes the ongoing work to resolve outstanding issues relating to Syria's initial declaration. South Africa is encouraged by the transparent and open dialogue and cooperation in good faith between the interim Syrian Government and the Syrian National Authority and the OPCW as a necessary step forward to ensure the speedy resolution of all outstanding issues. Equally, geopolitical interests should not be allowed to undermine trust in the OPCW.

South Africa calls for the destruction of all Old Chemical Weapons (OCW) and Abandoned Chemical Weapons (ACW) to be completed in the shortest time possible. The

goal of the total elimination of all chemical weapons cannot be achieved without the destruction of these old and abandoned weapons.

South Africa continues to support the OPCW as the only technically competent international authority in the field of chemical weapons. We call on all States Parties to redouble efforts to restore a consensus culture in the work of the Organisation, in order to cultivate an environment of cooperation and mutual agreement which is essential for the attainment of the aspirations of the Convention.

The full implementation of Article XI to strengthen and accelerate the economic and technological development of States Parties, especially in the developing world, remains a key priority for South Africa. The *Africa Programme* is a core component of the International Cooperation and Assistance (ICA) programmes and South Africa notes the progress made under the *6th Phase of the Programme* and welcomes the consultations towards the conceptualization of the seventh phase.

Finally, we call upon the OPCW to adopt and implement staff recruitment and selection policies and processes to ensure equitable geographical diversity and gender representation particularly from Africa, in accordance with Article VIII of the Convention.

Chairperson,

South Africa welcomes the decision by the Ninth Review Conference to establish a Working Group open to all States Parties with the aim to develop specific measures, including possible legally-binding measures, that could include recommendations to strengthen and institutionalise the Convention.

In this regard, South Africa remains fully engaged in the Working Group towards the fulfilment of its mandate, including the establishment of the two mechanisms, open to all States Parties, i) to facilitate and support the full implementation of international cooperation and assistance under Article X, and ii) to facilitate and support the full implementation of scientific and technological developments relevant to the Convention.

South Africa has also tabled its Working Paper on the voluntary guidelines for consideration at the fourth meeting of the Working Group on Article VII, on assistance, response and preparedness, which still remains valid and open for endorsement.

South Africa, as an African country and member of NAM, also shares the view that Article X should promote the right of States Parties to participate in the exchange of technology, equipment, materials and scientific information for peaceful purposes, and that States Parties in a position to do so, should contribute to the further development of scientific knowledge and discoveries in this field.

South Africa also attaches great importance to the United Nations Secretary-General's Mechanism (UNSGM). With its unique but well-defined technical mandate to establish the facts regarding alleged chemical or biological weapon incidents and to report promptly the results of the investigations. We consider the legal situation of the Mechanism to be

clear and unambiguous, and do not find the current technical guidelines and procedures to be wanting.

Chairperson,

In the area of conventional arms, South Africa continues to be fully committed to, and actively supports the full implementation of the humanitarian disarmament instruments to which it is a State Party, such as the Convention on Cluster Munitions, the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention and the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons.

Chairperson,

With the adoption of the Global Framework for Through-life Conventional Ammunition Management in 2023, we have put in place a set of political commitments to prevent diversion, illicit trafficking, and misuse of ammunition. It also ensures the safety and security of conventional ammunition throughout its life cycle. We welcome the convening of the Preparatory Meeting of States from 23 to 27 June 2025 in New York to explore possible options for the development of the process and modalities for the effective implementation of the Global Framework. We are pleased that Member States agreed on a voluntary reporting template which they will use to provide an initial overview in 2026 on their implementation of the Global Framework. We further welcome the call for international cooperation and assistance to strengthen States' national capacities to effectively address the diverse challenges associated with conventional ammunition, including through the Fellowship Programme. We look forward to the successful convening of the meeting of States in 2027 to advance implementation of the framework to ensure safe and sustainable management of conventional ammunition through its life cycle.

South Africa reiterates its support for the outcome document of the Fourth UN Conference to Review Progress Made in the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (UNPoA) adopted without a vote in June 2024. South Africa, remains committed to the implementation of the outcome document and will continue to take forward the important outcomes of this Conference through the annual omnibus resolution entitled, "The illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects" that South Africa, Colombia and Japan are co-penholders of.

Chairperson,

South Africa welcomes the consensus adoption of the final report of the Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) on security of, and in the use of information and communications technologies (2021-2025). We look forward to smooth transition of the OEWG to Global Mechanism in 2026. This process has been important to build mutual trust between States and promote peaceful cooperation between States relating to matters of new and emerging technologies in the context of international security. We hope that this will

provide Member States with the impetus to address outer space and artificial intelligence with the same spirit of cooperation that enabled us to establish the Global Mechanism.

With regards to the many threats faced by States, South Africa re-emphasizes the importance of cooperative measures in addressing threats against Information and Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure. We believe that the adoption of the final report of the OEWG represents an important milestone for the international community by setting up a framework for single-track, Member State-led permanent mechanism reporting to the First Committee of the UNGA. We remain hopeful that there will be further discussions in the Global Mechanism on the operationalisation of the Voluntary Checklist of Practical Actions as well as on the template for requesting assistance, which we consider critical in addressing the capacity challenges of States, particularly in developing countries. We also look forward to the establishment of the two Dedicated Thematic Groups of the Global Mechanism, and that of ad-hoc Dedicated Thematic Groups to engage in focused discussions within a fixed duration, and without prejudging the discussions and outcomes of plenary meetings.

We also welcome the convening of the UN Disarmament Commission, which will conclude the last session of the three-year cycle of its deliberations in 2026 on “recommendations for achieving the objective of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons;” as well as, “recommendations on common understandings related to emerging technologies in the context of international security”. We are concerned that the UN Disarmament Commission has been unable to make progress on recommendations of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation since 1999. South Africa would like to reiterate the importance to urgently make progress in this regard and hopes that the 2026 session will provide the necessary momentum towards this achievement.

We further welcome the progress made and the commencement of substantive deliberations in the Open-ended Working Group on the Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space (PAROS), in July 2025, and look forward to continued constructive engagement in the ensuing years.

We would like to see further progress towards ensuring that outer space is reserved for peaceful uses exclusively. Member States should commit to ensuring that there is no placement of any weapon in outer space. The international norm should be to use outer space technologies for the peaceful development of humankind. In the interim, we believe that the international community should negotiate a treaty on the prevention of an arms race in outer space without delay. We should, furthermore, avoid any duplication of efforts to prevent an arms race in outer space.

Chairperson,

The need for cooperation compromise, and our collective efforts, particularly given the complex and geopolitically strained global security environment in which we find ourselves, is vital in order for us to fulfil our obligations in the maintenance of international peace and security. South Africa is a strong proponent of multilateralism, adherence to

international rule of law and the consistent and non-discriminatory application of relevant instruments in dealing with current and emerging global challenges.

The disarmament machinery stands as a central means to achieve global security. In these unpredictable times, it is essential to ensure that the disarmament machinery components are able to fulfil their respective mandates. We take note of the developments in the Conference on Disarmament (CD) where it was able to adopt a decision which established five Subsidiary Bodies (SBs), that undertook discussions this year and note the possible re-establishment of these Subsidiary Bodies in 2026. We regret that these SBs have not taken us closer to negotiations of treaties in the CD and wish to recall the mandate of the CD as the single multilateral negotiating forum on disarmament and therefore call on the CD to commence its substantive work.

Chairperson,

Giving effect to the solemn commitment to save future generations from the horror and the scourge of war will require the collective will of all States geared towards achieving and maintaining international peace and security.

We will elaborate our positions in more detail in the thematic discussions but would like to again reiterate our full cooperation with you and all delegations to ensure a fruitful outcome to the work of this important Committee.

I thank you.