بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

MALDIVES

Statement by
Ahmed Salman Zaki,
Counsellor at the Permanent Mision of Maldives to the UN
at the
General Debate of the First Committee

Thank you, Chair.

1. We recognize why military spending is rising. Wars, attacks, and regional tensions create genuine fears. Yet when one State's response triggers another's, military competition can deepen the insecurity it is meant to answer. For small States, the risks are especially acute. Our security depends on restraint, international law, and rules that apply equally to all.

2. A State may increase its arsenal in the name of security. But security is not measured by the number of weapons it holds. It is measured by whether people are protected, conflict is prevented, and every State, including the smallest, retains the freedom to shape its own future.

3. The Maldives therefore sees three priorities for this Committee.

4. **First**, nuclear disarmament must return to implementation. The 2026 NPT Review Conference ended without an agreed outcome for the third time in a row. The New START Treaty has expired. A sovereign future cannot rest on the threat of nuclear annihilation.

5. Risk reduction cannot replace disarmament. But it can help prevent a crisis from becoming a catastrophe while disarmament advances. We therefore encourage all nuclear-armed States to return to strategic dialogue, notify one another of major exercises and launches, and agree on procedures to clarify incidents that may be misread. All States must also refrain from threatening or using nuclear weapons. States that have not done so should ratify the CTBT and join the TPNW. The upcoming first Review Conference of the TPNW is an opportunity to turn its commitments into action.

6. Disarmament must also advance alongside non-proliferation and peaceful uses. Since joining the IAEA in 2025, the Maldives has begun seeking cooperation in cancer care and radiation safety.

7. **Second,** we need stronger safeguards against the diversion of conventional weapons. Small arms and light weapons fuel violence and organized crime. States should verify end-user certificates, record transfers in national systems, and investigate unexplained losses.

8. The UN Programme of Action and the Arms Trade Treaty offer tools for this work. But many small States need technical assistance to use them. This is where the Office for Disarmament Affairs can work together with interested States on implementation, including on fulfilling reporting obligations, providing customs training or ensuring stockpile security.

9. At the same time, arms transfers must not enable grave violations or shield them from scrutiny. Israel's military operations have devastated Gaza, and civilians continue to face widespread destruction. The Maldives calls on States to halt arms transfers to Israel. States Parties to the Arms Trade Treaty must assess the risk that arms could be used to commit or facilitate serious violations of international humanitarian and human rights law.

10. **Third,** every State must have a voice in shaping the rules for military technologies that influence its security. Artificial intelligence and autonomous weapons are already changing warfare. Machines must not decide on their own who lives or dies. A sovereign future requires these decisions to remain subject to human judgement and accountability. Autonomous weapons whose use cannot comply with international law must be banned and other systems must be regulated to ensure meaningful human control.

11. In outer space, we should prevent an arms race and agree on practical measures to avoid dangerous incidents.

12. In cyberspace, States should protect hospitals, water systems, power grids and other critical infrastructure from malicious cyber activity

13. Chair, these choices are especially consequential for small States. Limited military power does not diminish our sovereign equality, our right to security, or our voice in shaping the rules that govern international security. Let us ensure that every State, however small, can help shape its own security and future.

I thank you.