



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

SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL STATEMENT FOR THE GENERAL DEBATE

DELIVERED BY AMBASSADOR XOLISA MABHONGO

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Mr President,

It is an honour to finally congratulate you on your assumption of the Presidency of this Review Conference. We are grateful for the extensive outreach and consultations you have undertaken and for the transparency in engaging with all States Parties. We assure you of South Africa's support for your presidency.

My delegation aligns with the statements delivered by the African Group, the Non-Aligned Movement and the New Agenda Coalition.

Mr President,

The current fraught geopolitical context we are going through places ahead of us a number of challenges that exacerbates the uncertainty surrounding the future of the disarmament and non-proliferation regime.

In this difficult context, we have seen the flaunting of nuclear weapons as tools of coercion. We continue to see the modernisation and open calling for the expansion of nuclear arsenals. At the same time the global norm against nuclear testing is being challenged with public statements on the resumption of nuclear explosives testing. All of this coupled with a doubling down on nuclear weapons in national security doctrines and policies by nuclear-weapon States and some non-nuclear-weapon States is heightening nuclear risks.

In this regard, the enduring value of the Treaty as a major component of the global disarmament and non-proliferation architecture needs to stand out. The NPT and its indefinite extension was carefully negotiated and painstakingly implemented since 1995. This was meant to allow us to work in good faith towards achieving nuclear disarmament while

preventing nuclear proliferation and facilitating the peaceful uses of nuclear science and technology.

South Africa's commitment to the NPT is anchored in our belief that neither the pursuit, nor the possession of nuclear weapons can bring about security or resolve conflict, which can only be addressed through negotiations and a diplomatic solution. South Africa took the unilateral decision to destroy its nuclear weapons and to become a state party to the NPT because we saw our security being guaranteed by its provisions.

Through the NPT, we have shown determination to avoid the existential threat posed by nuclear weapons to humanity while also using it for the betterment of humanity through the peaceful use of nuclear technology.

Despite the ambition from the 1995, 2000 and 2010 outcomes, these commitments remain unfulfilled, especially the elimination of nuclear weapons. Divisions and frustration with a lack of progress on this longstanding issue has grown. The 1995, 2000, and 2010 commitments, that have largely been unfulfilled, remain valid until fully implemented. The reinterpretation, backtracking, and complete abandonment of these commitments reflects a lack of integrity and undermining of the NPT process, casting doubt on the value of new commitments and the process itself. I must reiterate that there is no conditionality for the full implementation of the Treaty.

What is clear is that with the lack of implementation of the obligations and commitments, especially on the disarmament pillar, and that the threats posed to the disarmament and non-proliferation regime are evolving with the possibility of even destroying confidence in the grand bargain between nuclear-weapon States and non-nuclear-weapon States.

The modernisation programmes, security policy postures and increases in the role of nuclear weapons in security doctrines of nuclear-weapon States reverses any positive gains in the reduction in the number of nuclear weapons, and contradicts the commitment to "good faith" negotiations on nuclear disarmament. This risks creating the conditions for vertical and horizontal proliferation.

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 continue to advocate for presumed benefits of deterrence and therefore encourage the on-going possession of nuclear weapons, an impediment to nuclear disarmament goal. It must be restated that building security on nuclear deterrence is not sustainable. When nuclear deterrence fails, it will fail with catastrophic effects for humanity.

During this Review Conference we will hear a number of arguments on the current security environment not being conducive for nuclear disarmament. In this regard, we are rather convinced that the current security environment allows no room for procrastination. It is in times of crisis that the menace of nuclear weapons is at its most apparent.

The NPT has failed to adopt outcome documents at the past two Review Conferences. What is needed now is an effort in earnest to ease the divisions in the international community, restore and strengthen the functioning of the NPT.

Mr President,

Nuclear risk reduction measures could help to pave the way towards nuclear disarmament. However, any risk reduction measure must not be addressed minimally, and among the non-nuclear-weapon States there should be a special role in initiatives for states that accommodate nuclear weapons in their military doctrines.

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. Therefore, such practical improvements to transparency under the disarmament Pillar is urgently needed.

With the close of this eleventh review cycle, we have an opportunity to translate words into concrete actions. It will therefore be important not only to have a comprehensive review and assessment of the current status of the Treaty, but also to assess the progress made during the period under review. We need to agree on actions for the next review cycle that are aligned with the Treaty's objectives and through such efforts look ahead with greater ambition.

Mr President,

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. The success of this or any other Review Conference will be determined by the extent to which these undertakings are practically implemented.

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.

Emerging non-proliferation challenges remain a concern. Developments related to naval nuclear propulsion raises unique challenges and new modalities regarding nuclear sharing are being seen as incompatible with NPT obligations. These have the potential to divide States Parties and potentially act as a destabilising factor which could obstruct nuclear disarmament and fuel an arms race.

South Africa strongly supports the principle of the inviolability of peaceful nuclear facilities. South Africa notes with particular concern the implications for nuclear safety, security and safeguards implementation arising from attacks on nuclear facilities. We support the firm stance of the IAEA General Conference against armed attacks on peaceful nuclear installations as violations of the UN Charter and international law.

The military attacks by an IAEA Member State not party to the Treaty on the Non Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) against a NPT State Party and IAEA Member State's nuclear facilities under IAEA safeguards cannot but have serious implications for the international non-proliferation regime and for the NPT, on which the global majority rely on for international peace and security. It would be important for this Conference to unite behind a clear, unambiguous norm against any attacks on peaceful nuclear facilities.

Mr President,

The humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons cannot be overemphasised thus, it is important to acknowledge the historical moment of the coming into force of the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. 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 stigmatise and delegitimise nuclear weapons based on the adverse and indefensible humanitarian consequences of their use. We must recognise that this Treaty is the democratic wish of the overwhelming majority of UN Member States and the people of the world and supports the NPT by providing a legal pathway toward the implementation of Article VI and achieving a world free of nuclear weapons.

Mr President,

Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones play an important role in preventing the proliferation - both vertically and horizontally - of nuclear weapons. The African Nuclear Weapons Free Zone Treaty, together with the African Commission on Nuclear Energy (AFCONE) that was established for the purpose of ensuring compliance with the obligations under the treaty, contribute to prevent the presence of nuclear weapons on the African Continent thus fostering progress towards a world free of nuclear weapons and utilising nuclear technology for peaceful

development purposes. Accordingly, South Africa supports the establishment of new nuclear-weapon-free zones, including our continued support for the establishment of a Middle East zone free from all weapons of mass destruction and the implementation of the 1995 NPT resolution.

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 and is therefore encouraged by the progress that has been made since 2022 in terms of the number of States that have now concluded Comprehensive Safeguards Agreements and Additional Protocols. We abhor the selective targeting and punishment powerful states use when it suits them to evoke this Article.

Mr President,

South Africa endorses the reflection of the Conference on the leading role of the IAEA in promoting the benefits of nuclear energy, including the Technical Cooperation, as well as its efforts to enhance nuclear safety and security and strengthen the safeguards regime.

South Africa supports the inalienable right of nations to pursue the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. 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. We commend the modernisation of IAEA laboratories in Seibersdorf which are instrumental in the realisation of these benefits. South Africa attaches great importance to the IAEA's Technical Cooperation Programme which contributes towards addressing the socio-economic needs and sustainable development goals of all Member states and especially developing countries.

To conclude,

South Africa supports the full implementation of the NPT and its universality with the goal of 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 recognised and upheld. If we can build common ground in these areas, we will be well placed for a positive outcome from this RevCon. This requires fresh thinking, flexibility and resolve to achieve the NPT's promise.

I thank you.