



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

SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL STATEMENT FOR MAIN COMMITTEE I – NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT

31 APRIL 2026

Chairperson,

I congratulate you on your assumption of the Chairship of Main Committee 1 and assure you of South Africa's support.

South Africa associates itself with the statements delivered on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and the New Agenda Coalition.

Chairperson,

The task before this Committee is particularly demanding, as our review encompasses the sole article of the Treaty that has seen no substantive progress over the past five decades. As underscored by numerous delegations, including South Africa, during this review cycle, as in previous cycles, the persistently widening implementation gap between nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation obligations remains a central and unresolved challenge to the credibility and integrity of the NPT.

Whilst significant progress has been made in fulfilling the nuclear non-proliferation obligations of the Treaty, the full implementation of commitments to nuclear disarmament as contained in Article VI of the NPT and reaffirmed by the subsequent unequivocal undertaking made by the nuclear-weapon States to achieve the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals, remains largely unrealised. Our concerted efforts to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons should be matched by a concurrent effort to eliminate all nuclear weapons, in a transparent, verifiable and irreversible manner, and to achieve universal adherence to the NPT.

Chairperson,

Annual global spending on nuclear weapons has surpassed US\$ 90 billion. During the last few years we have continued to witness determined efforts by some States to dilute, negate and reinterpret the nuclear disarmament commitments. When combined with expansive modernisation programmes, persistent reliance on deterrence doctrines and new modalities regarding nuclear sharing, these actions display long-term strategies designed to perpetuate the retention of nuclear weapons, thus polarising the nuclear non-proliferation regime and fundamentally undermine the integrity of the NPT.

Recent nuclear policy reviews that elevate the role of nuclear weapons within security doctrines, coupled with the current modernization efforts undertaken by nuclear-weapon States and the development of increasingly sophisticated delivery systems are fuelling the growing risk of a renewed nuclear arms race.

The hardening of positions in defence of nuclear deterrence not only obstructs progress under Article VI but also contributes directly to proliferation risks.

South Africa believes the NPT cannot succeed if it serves the security interests of a few rather than all. States that rely on nuclear weapons for their own security cannot credibly champion non-proliferation, as such double standards undermine the Treaty's legitimacy. Nuclear weapons do not enhance security, rather they threaten it, regardless of who possesses them.

South Africa is of the firm view that any future outcome must preserve and uphold and not roll back or reinterpret the agreements reached during the 1995 and 2000 Review Conferences, and reaffirmed by the 2010 Review Conference, which remain the agreed benchmarks for nuclear disarmament and must be fully implemented.

South Africa rejects any conditionality on nuclear disarmament and any attempt to dilute the unequivocal undertaking by nuclear-weapon States.

Furthermore, Chairperson, it is evident that the nuclear deterrence doctrine may encourage or even support arguments in favour of the proliferation of nuclear weapons. Like others, South Africa shares concerns regarding the actions of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's (DPRK), which also constitute a clear violation of various resolutions of the UN Security Council. The current tensions and nuclear rhetoric on the Korean Peninsula clearly illustrate 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.

In a world marked by widespread poverty, rising unemployment and deepening social and economic inequalities, it is indefensible that vast resources continue to be diverted away from urgently needed development priorities towards the production, maintenance and modernisation of nuclear arsenals. At a time when millions still lack access to basic opportunities, such expenditures reflect a profound misalignment of global priorities. Nuclear-weapon States must demonstrate genuine political will by fully implementing the 2010 Action Plan, setting a credible and responsible example on nuclear disarmament, and refraining from pursuing the lowest common denominator in meeting their Treaty obligations.

Given this situation, South Africa recommends that this Conference:

- Urges all States Parties to commit to urgently pursue policies and actions that are fully compatible with and actively advance the Treaty's object and purpose.
- Reaffirms the continued validity of the 1995 decision on "Principles and objectives for nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament", the practical steps agreed to in the Final Document of the 2000 Review Conference and the "Conclusions and Recommendations for follow-on actions" of the 2010 Review Conference, and urges the nuclear-weapon States to accelerate measurable and irreversible progress towards nuclear disarmament through the adoption of clear and specific timelines and benchmarks.
- Urges nuclear-weapon States to stop their modernisation programmes and redirect the substantial resources allocated to these programmes toward development assistance and sustainable development priorities.

Chairperson,

While nuclear-weapon States persist in asserting that nuclear weapons are essential to their security, non-nuclear-weapon States regard their mere existence as a profound threat to global security and human survival. These justifications not only encourage further proliferation, but directly undermine the obligations, legitimacy, and sustainability of the NPT regime.

Beyond assertions about the supposed security benefits of nuclear weapons, some States further contend that the prevailing international security environment is not conducive for nuclear disarmament.

In this regard, South Africa is of the firm view that any future outcome must preserve and uphold and not roll back or reinterpret the agreements reached during the 1995 and 2000 Review Conferences, and reaffirmed by the 2010 Review Conference, which remain the agreed benchmarks for nuclear disarmament.

South Africa therefore rejects any conditionality for nuclear disarmament and any efforts to dilute or reinterpret agreed undertakings, obligations and principles, especially the unequivocal undertaking and obligation of the NWS to disarm.

South Africa recommends that this Conference:

- reaffirms the unequivocal undertaking by nuclear-weapon States towards nuclear disarmament as well as the principles agreed at previous NPT Review Conferences, and stresses that the principles of transparency, irreversibility and verifiability must apply to all nuclear disarmament, nuclear arms reduction and arms control measures, with clearly defined timelines and benchmarks for the implementation of these commitments.

Chairperson,

Beyond the obligations set out in Article VI, there is no more compelling imperative for the pursuit of nuclear disarmament than the catastrophic humanitarian consequences that would result from any use of nuclear weapons.

Concerns over these catastrophic effects have existed since the first use of these weapons and were a central impetus behind the establishment of the NPT. They remain as relevant and urgent today and continue to underpin the imperative that the Treaty's provisions are fully and faithfully implemented.

South Africa has long emphasised the humanitarian imperatives underpinning the pursuit of a world without the threat posed by the possession, use and proliferation of nuclear weapons. These imperatives have now become a fundamental global concern and must form the core of all deliberations, actions and decisions concerning nuclear weapons.

Given the understanding on the catastrophic humanitarian consequences, South Africa recommends that this Conference:

- Reiterates State Parties' "deep concern at the continued risk for humanity represented by the possibility that these weapons could be used and the catastrophic humanitarian consequences that would result from the use of nuclear weapons".
- Notes the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) providing a legal pathway toward the implementation of Article VI.

- Acknowledges that the TPNW is an effective nuclear disarmament instrument that contributes to the implementation of Article VI and a complementary tool for the NPT by giving concrete effect to disarmament obligations.
- Reiterates that the TPNW neither replaces nor diminishes the obligations and commitments that States have already undertaken under the NPT and other relevant instruments.

Chairperson,

Concerns about nuclear risks have gained increasing prominence in the discussions leading up to this Review Conference. These concerns arise from troubling developments related to modernisation programmes, including qualitative and quantitative expansion, deteriorating security environment, heightened tensions among nuclear-weapon States, the emerging role of Artificial Intelligence on nuclear weapon enhancements and their delivery systems, and a growing awareness of the catastrophic humanitarian consequences that would result from any nuclear weapon detonation.

South Africa supports nuclear risk reduction as a complementary measure, but not as a substitute for genuine disarmament, nor as a means to legitimise the indefinite possession of nuclear weapons or obscure their inherently catastrophic nature. Measures to reduce the risk of nuclear weapons use will not in themselves eliminate the underlying risk of use. The only way to completely remove the risks associated with nuclear weapons is their total, irreversible and verifiable elimination, and the legally binding assurance that they will never be produced again.

Preferably, discussions on transparency and measurability needs to take precedence. In this regard, South Africa urges States parties to agree to clear, transparent and measurable benchmarks with defined timelines for how nuclear-weapon States will fulfil their disarmament obligations and commitments.

While nuclear-weapon States bear a special responsibility to reduce the risks associated with nuclear weapons, non-nuclear-weapon States also have a role to play, as these risks affect the security of all States and underscore the imperative of achieving undiminished security for all.

In this context, it must also be emphasised among the non-nuclear-weapon States, those that continue to assign a role for nuclear weapons in their military doctrines bear an additional responsibility to contribute to efforts aimed at reducing nuclear risks and advancing undiminished security for all and to also demonstrate that their policies and military doctrines are not contrary to the overarching objective of the complete elimination of nuclear weapons.

South Africa recommends that this Conference:

- Considers calling for concrete and effective nuclear risk reduction measures that go beyond symbolic political signals and exclusive dialogues among nuclear-weapon States.
- Not encumber non-nuclear-weapon States with the primary workload and disproportionate burden of transparency and confidence-building measures, which must not substitute for concrete disarmament actions by nuclear-weapon States.

On the issue of the Treaty on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (New START) and the Treaty on the Limitation of Anti-Ballistic Missile Systems (ABM), South Africa recalls that the abrogation of the ABM Treaty and the expiry of New START have brought about an additional element of uncertainty. We had warned that

this could also have grave consequences for the future of global security and create apparent rationales for action based solely on unilateral concerns. Any action — including the development of missile defence systems — which could impact negatively on nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation, is of concern to the international community and South Africa likewise remains concerned about the risk of a new arms race on earth and in outer space. We regret that the New Start Treaty lapsed without the negotiation and conclusion of a successor Agreement. We underline the urgent need to formally launch negotiations toward a successor to New START that expands upon its framework and results in deeper, verifiable reductions in deployed and non-deployed nuclear arsenals. In the interim, pending the conclusion of a new, comprehensive agreement between the Russian Federation and the United States, South Africa emphasises the importance of both parties respecting the limits on stockpiles set out under New START.

South Africa recommends that this Conference:

- Urge the parties to the New START Treaty to resume its implementation and urgently return to the negotiating table to agree on successor arrangements.

In conclusion Chairperson, South Africa recommends that the Conference reaffirms its call upon all States Parties to align their policies and actions fully with the Treaty and the shared objective of achieving a world without nuclear weapons.

I thank you.