Mr. Chair,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union.

The following countries align themselves with this statement: North Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania, the Republic of Moldova, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway.

I congratulate you on your appointment as Chair of the UN Disarmament Commission during its 2024 session. You can be assured of the EU’s support and cooperation. Likewise, I congratulate Georgia and El Salvador on their roles as chairs of the two Working Groups and assure both of the EU’s support and cooperation.

The current international security context continues to be marked by Russia’s illegal war of aggression against Ukraine, the situation in the Middle East and multiple proliferation crises. The EU reiterates its resolute condemnation of Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine, which constitutes a manifest violation of the UN Charter, and reaffirms its unwavering support for Ukraine’s independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders. The EU strongly condemns the continued support provided to Russia by the Belarusian regime, the DPRK and Iran, and calls on all States to refrain from supporting Russia’s war of aggression. In this context, the EU also strongly condemns the use of a veto by Russia just this past Thursday blocking the extension of the mandate of the 1718 DPRK
Sanctions Committee’s Panel of Experts. We believe this veto is an effort to conceal unlawful arms transfers between the DPRK and Russia. The EU is appalled by the unprecedented loss of civilian lives and the critical humanitarian situation in the Middle East, and calls for an immediate humanitarian pause leading to a sustainable ceasefire, the unconditional release of all hostages and the provision of humanitarian assistance. The EU reiterates its condemnation of Hamas in the strongest possible terms for its brutal and indiscriminate terrorist attacks across Israel on 7 October 2023, recognising Israel’s right to defend itself in line with international law and international humanitarian law.

In this complex security context, the EU fully acknowledges the UNDC’s role as a specialised, subsidiary body for in-depth deliberations on specific disarmament issues. Upholding the rules-based international order, founded on the UN Charter, is more important than ever. The EU will continue to support effective multilateralism and to defend, promote and further strengthen the global architecture for disarmament and non-proliferation, including multilateral export control regimes.

However, certain UN Members continue to disregard their obligations and commitments and abuse the rule of consensus in an attempt to bring to a halt, or even reverse, progress on the path to disarmament and non-proliferation. Russia’s suspension of its implementation of the New START Treaty, the revocation of its ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), and its repeated recourse to irresponsible nuclear rhetoric and threats to use nuclear force in relation to its illegal war of aggression against Ukraine, are just a few blatant examples of this worrying trend. The EU will continue to denounce these attempts at undermining the multilateral non-proliferation and disarmament architecture that the international community has developed over decades.
The EU is encouraged by the UNDC’s progress in 2023 in delivering recommendations to promote the practical implementation of transparency and confidence-building measures in outer space activities with the goal of preventing an arms race in outer space. We remain fully committed to developing recommendations for achieving the objective of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons.

The EU continues to consider the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons as the cornerstone of the global nuclear non-proliferation regime and the essential foundation for the pursuit of nuclear disarmament, in accordance with its Article VI. We are concerned that two Review Conferences have ended without agreement due to the unconstructive attitude of some States Parties. We therefore call on all States Parties to engage constructively to achieve a substantive contribution at this summer’s Preparatory Committee in order to build a basis towards a much-needed meaningful and forward-looking outcome in 2026. Work should continue on strengthening the review process, including on transparency and accountability, based on the encouraging exchanges and strong cross-regional engagement at the 2023 working group.

The EU reiterates our strong, resolute and continuous support for all three pillars of the NPT and will continue to promote the comprehensive, balanced and substantive full implementation of the 2010 Review Conference Action plan. The EU further stresses the need to implement all obligations under the NPT, and commitments during previous Review Conferences, including the need for concrete progress towards the full implementation of Article VI of the NPT, with the ultimate goal of the total elimination of nuclear weapons. We encourage seeking further reductions to nuclear arsenals, including strategic and non-strategic, deployed and non-deployed weapons, and discussions on confidence-building, transparency, risk reduction and verification, laying the ground for more robust future arms control agreements.
The EU is deeply concerned by Russia’s suspension of the New START Treaty. We call on Russia to immediately return to full implementation and to engage in negotiations with the United States on a successor agreement. We are concerned by the rapid, extensive and opaque build-up of China’s nuclear arsenal. We call on China to substantially engage in arms control dialogue, immediately take measures to improve transparency on its nuclear weapons and doctrine, refrain from further build-up, which is not in line with its commitments under the NPT, and pursue risk reduction measures. In this regard, we call on Russia and China to respond constructively to the United States’ offer to engage in bilateral arms control discussions without preconditions.

The CTBT is of crucial importance to nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. Its entry into force remains a top priority. The EU deplores the unprecedented decision of Russia to revoke its ratification and calls on it to respect the object and purpose of the Treaty.

The EU supports the immediate commencement and early conclusion of negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament of a treaty banning the production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons or other explosive devices (FMCT). Pending an agreement on an FMCT, we reiterate our call on China and all other States concerned to declare and uphold an immediate moratorium on the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.

The EU recognises the important work of the International Atomic Energy Agency and that its safeguards system is a fundamental component of the nuclear non-proliferation regime. The Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement, together with the Additional Protocol, constitute the
current verification standard and should be universalised without delay.

The EU condemns the DPRK’s continued development of its nuclear and ballistic missile programmes and calls upon the DPRK to refrain from conducting another nuclear test. Furthermore, the DPRK’s continued provision of ballistic missiles to Russia are in flagrant breach of the UN arms embargos established by UN Security Council resolutions. The DPRK must comply immediately with its obligations under UN Security Council resolutions by abandoning all its nuclear weapons, other WMDs, ballistic missile and nuclear programmes, in a complete, verifiable and irreversible manner, and cease all related activities. The DPRK must engage in meaningful discussions with all relevant parties to build a basis for sustainable peace and security and to take steps aimed at pursuing the complete, verifiable, irreversible denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

The EU will engage actively and constructively in the discussions of Working Group II towards developing recommendations on common understandings related to emerging technologies in the context of international security. The EU is aware of the urgent need to address both the opportunities and challenges posed by emerging technologies in the military domain ensuring compliance with international law, in particular International Humanitarian Law, and taking into account relevant ethical considerations. We are pleased to note that the accompanying description of the agenda item underlines that duplication of existing discussions in other fora will be avoided. This includes the Group of Governmental Experts related to emerging technologies in the area of Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS), the Biological Weapons Convention, the OEWG on security of and in the use of ICTs 2021–2025 and the multilateral efforts to address security threats in outer space.

This session takes place as negotiations for a Pact for the Future are pursued. In this context,
the EU supports engaging in processes to further enhance and reform the functioning of the existing disarmament machinery, including the Conference on Disarmament and other relevant fora, such as the UNDC.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.