SPEAKING NOTES FOR THE OPEN-ENDED WORKING GROUP (OEWG): GENERAL EXCHANGE, 14/15 May 2013

Chairperson,

At the outset, my delegation wishes to congratulate you on your election as Chair of the Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) on taking forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations and to assure you of our fullest support and co-operation. We are convinced that, under your able leadership, this OEWG will be able to inject the necessary impetus towards the resumption of multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations for a more just, peaceful and secure world.

South Africa fully associates itself with the statement delivered by Brazil on behalf of the New Agenda Coalition (NAC).

Chairperson,

Given the ongoing challenges facing the multilateral disarmament machinery and the absence of any movement in the area of nuclear disarmament, we believe that this OEWG provides us with a timely opportunity to reflect both on the causes of the long-standing impasse and to develop appropriate responses that will enable us to secure and maintain our shared goal of a world free from the threat posed by nuclear weapons.

The slow pace of nuclear disarmament since the end of the Cold War, rather than delivering on the expected peace dividend, has bred increasing mistrust among States. This confidence-deficit has been exacerbated by the apparent lack of preparations by those who possess nuclear arms for a future without these horrific instruments. This is particularly evident in the continued modernization of nuclear arsenals, the development of advanced and new types of nuclear weapons, as well as the continued salience of nuclear weapons in military doctrines, which run counter to the undertakings made by the nuclear-weapon States (NWS). This situation has not only encouraged further proliferation, but also continues to destabilise international relations and co-operation, which are essential to addressing our common security concerns in an increasingly interdependent world. Since nuclear disarmament is about the very survival of humanity and is undoubtedly in our common interest, this cannot be left to the few that continue to ignore the democratic will of the vast majority of States and peoples.
Chairperson,

South Africa has always emphasised the humanitarian imperatives that underpin our search for a world without the threat posed by the possession, use and proliferation of nuclear weapons. It is encouraging that these considerations are today recognised as a fundamental and global concern that must be at the core of our work.

Beyond the devastating immediate and longer-term humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons, the continued production, modernisation, stockpiling and threat of use of nuclear weapons remain equally unacceptable. The vast public resources diverted towards nuclear weapons stand in stark contrast to the promises for development assistance made at the turn of the century in support of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Today, costs associated with the maintenance of nuclear arsenals amount to roughly more than double the development assistance provided to Africa. The status quo is clearly unacceptable and unsustainable in a world where the basic human needs of billions cannot be met.

Chairperson,

We must reject any justification for the continued retention or presumption of the indefinite possession of nuclear weapons. The question remains, why do those that refuse to eliminate these terrible weapons of mass destruction need them anyway? In reality, no rational argument can be advanced to explain, in a convincing manner, what is in fact nothing but the consequence of Cold War inertia and an attachment to the use or threat of use of brute force, to assert the primacy of some States over others. The retention of nuclear weapons is therefore not only immoral and inhumane, but also defies any logic.

Chairperson,

As long as nuclear weapons exist, and vertical and horizontal proliferation persists, the threat to humanity will remain. The only guarantee against this threat is the total elimination of all nuclear weapons and the assurance that they will never be produced again. All States have a legitimate stake in and responsibility for nuclear disarmament. As such, all of us - developed and developing, nuclear-weapon or non-nuclear-weapon States - have a contribution to make
towards the construction of a framework for the achievement and maintenance of a world without nuclear weapons.

We believe that such a framework must be legally-binding and include clearly defined benchmarks and timelines, backed by a strong system of verification. The successful development of a comprehensive framework is dependent on a detailed assessment of the various elements that will be required to sustain a world without nuclear weapons, to ascertain what already exists, to recognise the remaining implementation and universalisation challenges, and to identify gaps and elements that still need to be addressed.

Chairperson,

Given the mandate and inclusiveness of the OEWG, it provides a platform for all UN Member States and members of civil society to contribute to the development of proposals to take forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations. We look forward to contributing constructively to this meeting and to working together to secure a successful outcome to our efforts.

I thank you.