Mr. President, Ambassador Vierita, Excellencies, Distinguished delegates, Mr. Møller, Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, on behalf of the Secretary-General, I would like to congratulate Ambassador Vierita on his assumption of the Presidency of the Conference on Disarmament and convey his best wishes. The fact that Secretary-General Guterres decided to record his message to the Conference for the first time, demonstrates his strong commitment to the disarmament agenda. I can also assure you that he is committed to working closely with all of you.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

It is always a great privilege for me to speak as High Representative for Disarmament Affairs.

2017 is set to be a critical year for the advancement of disarmament negotiations. We will be confronted with some of the greatest challenges and opportunities we have had to face in more than two decades.

These developments all share one common theme – they are each taking place outside of this Council chamber. This requires serious reflection. This Conference is now facing a crisis of relevance. We cannot afford to let this become the new normal.

The only way forward is to fall back on the strength of the Conference – that is its inclusive nature. Looking across the various developments this year, it is clear that the CD will remain the only forum that will involve all the necessary stakeholders.

I therefore appeal to all States to bear in mind the need for all initiatives to ultimately lead us back to inclusive engagement. This is the only way we will eventually reach our common goal of a world without nuclear weapons.

With this appeal in mind, I will briefly touch upon some developments this year that are most closely connected to the core issues on your agenda.

First, the forthcoming negotiations on a treaty to prohibit nuclear weapons reflect both deep frustration over the current state of multilateral nuclear disarmament and heightened awareness over the international consequences of even a limited use of nuclear weapons.

The pursuit of these negotiations through the General Assembly does not diminish the responsibility of this Conference to make progress on nuclear disarmament. Rather, it lends urgency to the need for both nuclear and non-nuclear States to use this forum to narrow their
differences and to find common ground, including through comprehensive, inclusive, interactive and constructive approaches.

In that connection, it is notable that the high-level expert preparatory group on a fissile material cut-off treaty will commence its activities in March, just weeks shy of the twenty-second anniversary of the first achievement of a consensus negotiating mandate.

The inability of this Conference to build upon and implement that mandate has been a key driver of the current crisis facing disarmament and the lack of results of the past two decades. I hope the new expert group will develop concrete recommendations on the elements of a future treaty. Yet, the question of whether or not those recommendations will be carried forward in this body or elsewhere depends on all of you.

Finally, the commencement of the review process for the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons will be a real opportunity for the non-nuclear-weapon States and the nuclear-weapon States to re-address how to overcome their differences and to implement the 2010 Review Conference Action Plan. We cannot afford another repeat of 2015.

It is encouraging that all NPT States parties remain unified in their unanimous support for the integrity of the Treaty and its role as an essential framework for the pursuit of nuclear disarmament. I also welcome the invitation by the Arab League’s Committee of the Wise on Disarmament Issues to meet with the co-convenors of the conference on the Middle East zone to meet in Jordan later this week.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

The only viable option for the Conference on Disarmament is to return itself to a central role in the negotiation of multilateral disarmament instruments. Last year, the work of the Conference began with many new ideas and proposals for breaking the stalemate. Yet, despite unprecedented high-level engagement, the Conference quickly fell back into business as usual. This is frustrating and disappointing. It is also unsustainable.

The international community has demonstrated a clear will to move forward the process of multilateral disarmament outside of this body. If the Conference is to credibly maintain its role as the single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum, it must resume work on the basis of a comprehensive and balanced programme that reflects the current state of affairs in the field of disarmament.

To this end, I wish to suggest two criteria that could revive the Conference and help it to make an immediate contribution.

First, it remains essential to ultimately eliminate the gap between the nuclear haves and the nuclear have-nots. We must also ensure that the States possessing nuclear weapons stay unified in their own commitment to disarmament as the means for easing international tension, building trust, restoring mutual confidence and in promoting global peace and security.

Second, this Conference must adapt its focus to address emerging technologies, threats and challenges in the field of disarmament. Many of these emerging issues have implications for
strategic security and international stability. They also have the potential to affect all States and thus represent areas of common ground for action.

I believe that gains in these two areas can spill over into other parts of the disarmament agenda and unlock many of the underlying conditions that have blocked your work for decades.

I want to amplify the appeal made by Secretary-General Guterres for you to work harder to live up to your responsibility. I count on you to be creative, think outside the box and to continue to pursue new and innovative approaches, as the President has appealed to you.

In that spirit, I wish you a successful session.

Thank you.