It gives me great pleasure to greet the Conference on Disarmament as it opens its session for 2015.

The need for progress in multilateral disarmament is greater than ever. Increasing tension and instability around the world have severely diminished the prospects for new arms control measures, and are jeopardizing existing arrangements. Unresolved regional disputes are putting pressure on disarmament and non-proliferation norms. Modernization programmes for nuclear weapons are under way in all countries that possess them – steps that could lock in new types of warheads and their means of delivery for decades to come. And instead of seeking the peace and security of a nuclear-weapon-free world, many actors seem poised to retreat back into the false security promised by doctrines of mutually assured destruction.

These trends threaten to reverse the gains over the past two decades in the reduction of the global stockpile of deployed strategic weapons, and to undermine prospects for future progress. The urgent need for nuclear disarmament has also become more apparent as the international community comes to understand more about the humanitarian consequences of the use of nuclear weapons. Beyond the immediate death and destruction such weapons can cause, the socio-economic and environmental impacts would be catastrophic, with the poor and vulnerable being the most severely affected.

Against this backdrop, the international community simply cannot afford a Conference on Disarmament that does not help us move towards the goal of a safer world.

I would like to acknowledge the determined and creative efforts over the past year to bring this Conference back to work. I am encouraged that you have found ways to continue deliberations on matters of substance, despite the long years of impasse. Yet, the Conference on Disarmament was not designed to deliberate. Your mandate is to negotiate. Ultimately, the effectiveness of the Conference will be judged on a single criterion: its ability to conclude disarmament treaties.

Increasingly, governments and civil society are looking outside the Conference to make progress on disarmament. On 24 December, we celebrated the success of the latest such achievement with the entry into force of the Arms Trade Treaty. In the area of outer space, the United Nations General Assembly has strengthened support for the implementation of transparency and confidence-building measures and examined the question of the non-placement of weapons in outer space. This month, the group of governmental experts reconvened to continue to deliberate on how to deal with fissile materials.
As more of these efforts come to fruition, the role of the Conference on Disarmament as the single standing negotiating forum for multilateral disarmament risks being overtaken by events.

Past achievements of the Conference show its potential. I urge you to regain that sense of shared responsibility and do your part to advance peace and security through disarmament. In that spirit, I wish you success in the year ahead.