

**South Africa's Statement  
to the First Committee  
of the 57th General Assembly (BWTC)**

Mr Chairperson,

Let me extend my delegation's congratulations on your assumption of the chair of the First Committee for the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly. I wish to assure you of my delegation's full support and co-operation as you and the bureau lead the work of this Committee to a successful conclusion.

Mr Chairperson,

The crisis in the international community's endeavours to address non-proliferation, disarmament and arms control issues has further deepened in the last year. The international community has largely remained unable to substantively address these issues, which are some of the most central issues of our day. Narrow self-interest, unilateralism, lack of political will and statesmanship paralyse our multilateral fora, which were specifically established for these purposes. In a time when terrorism and the horrific consequences of possible use of weapons of mass destruction has captured international attention, the reality that sustainable initiatives to protect international peace and security are dependent on the collective participation of the international community appears to escape us.

It is obviously with deep regret that the Conference on Disarmament, which is defined as "the single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum of the international community" and which "has the primary role in substantive negotiations on priority questions of disarmament", has again been unable to agree on a Programme of Work. This is despite the fact that there is almost unanimous support in the CD for some mechanism to deal with the issues that we have been deliberating on over the last few years. This is despite the fact that there is general agreement that nuclear disarmament, the prevention of an arms race in outer space, and the negotiation of a fissile material treaty that will ban the production of fissile material for military purposes are concerns of the entire international community; and that United Nations General Assembly resolutions call on us to deal with these issues. Despite the valiant efforts and leadership shown in the CD by certain countries and their representatives this year, some delegations continue to refuse to recognise the legitimate concerns of other States, while insisting that respect and understanding should be shown for theirs. This continued intransigence has only exacerbated the situation and left the CD – an institution of great potential – exclusivist, undemocratic, unreformed, expensive and ineffective.

Mr Chairperson,

There has also been little progress on nuclear disarmament and little to show on the thirteen nuclear disarmament steps agreed to by all of the NPT's States Parties at the 2000 Review Conference. While de-alerting and reliance on substantively fewer

deployed nuclear weapons has made significant gains in the Moscow Treaty; real disarmament has not been addressed. Furthermore, the First Preparatory Committee in the new NPT Review cycle was disappointing. Although some delegations expended much energy and effort on proposals and reports, no substantive interaction took place and we ended up talking at each other but not with each other. This will need to be remedied for the second PrepCom and future deliberations.

As a country that stepped back from the nuclear weapons abyss, South Africa remains totally committed to the complete elimination of these weapons. We will, along with our partners in the New Agenda, submit two resolutions to the First Committee this year and count on past supporters to again join us in our pursuit towards a nuclear weapon-free world.

I also want to use this opportunity of extending South Africa's congratulations to Cuba on its decision to become a States Party of both the NPT and the Tlatelolco Treaty. This decision is of considerable significance as it now leaves only three States – India, Israel and Pakistan – outside the Treaty. Cuba's decision underscores the cardinal importance of the Treaty, not only as the international community's primary instrument for preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons, but also as a cornerstone for nuclear disarmament. Cuba's decision further underscores the importance of moving forward on the unequivocal commitment that was undertaken by all of the NPT States Parties to the accomplishment of nuclear disarmament and of the thirteen nuclear disarmament steps that all agreed upon in 2000. Cuba's decision emphasises the inter-relationship of nuclear non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament and of the fact that by staying outside the Treaty, States are inhibiting not only the achievement of the international community's goals in this regard, but also the goals of the masses of ordinary people around the world – whose voices are regrettably not often heard or taken cognisance of in this forum. Cuba's decision reinforces the self-evident truth that nuclear weapons must be taken out of the hands of all, whether they are States or terrorists, and that international peace and security cannot be based on the indefinite possession of nuclear weapons by, or the aspiration to nuclear weapons of, a few. Cuba's decision underscores the fact that nuclear weapons are not only a threat to those that possess them or to those that are currently being threatened by them, but that they are a threat to us all. Cuba's decision emphasises the fact that nuclear non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament is not only the preserve of those who possess nuclear weapons, but that the duty to address these issues rests upon us all.

South Africa also welcomes the endeavours of the five Central Asian States to establish a nuclear-weapon-free zone in that region and trust that these efforts will add further impetus to the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones in other parts of the world.

Mr Chairperson,

While the proliferation of missiles is deemed to be one of the escalating and immediate challenges to international peace and security, we were unable to collectively address even the most basic concerns in this field. The report of the UN Panel of Governmental

Experts on missiles in all its aspects is a sad reflection of the current state of disarmament affairs. Panel members had vigorous discussions, but could not agree on a single recommendation for a course of action and couldn't even agree on what the nature of the problem was.

The draft International Code of Conduct against the Proliferation of Ballistic Missiles (ICOC) has undergone some development phases in which South Africa has actively participated. Its success will depend on the degree to which the final draft will be able to attract support, especially from those States possessing these ballistic missiles. Early drafts have not managed to adequately address the utilisation of the benefits of space for peaceful purposes and while at this early stage the ICOC only attempts to address proliferation, it would be important to have a disarmament goal included.

Mr Chairperson,

The lack of progress regarding the early entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) continues to be of concern to my delegation. The Joint Ministerial Declaration in support of the CTBT released by Ministers of Foreign Affairs of eighteen countries on 14 September 2002, underlines the urgency and commitment Ministers have accorded entry into force of the Treaty.

In the area of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC), the situation has also moved from bad to worse – with a faint glimmer of hope being vested in the resumed meeting of the suspended BWC Review Conference, which is to take place in Geneva during November 2002. We had believed that the inability of the States Parties to adopt the draft Protocol to strengthen the implementation of the BWC, which had been the subject of detailed and protracted negotiation over so many years, was a low point in the history of the Convention and we had consequently approached the Review Conference in 2001 with skepticism and a low expectation. It, however, turned out to be possible for even skepticism and a low expectation to be further disappointed when the Conference had to be suspended, unable to even agree on a minimalist common position. The reconvened Review Conference will therefore be starting from a low point and it will be important for the overwhelming number of States Parties, who had joined together from all political groupings during the meetings in 2001, not to be forced into accepting a failure. South Africa was persuaded by the strong arguments put forward at the Review Conference by many of the States Parties (from all of the political groupings) that it would be important for the States Parties not to allow a situation where no further work is done to enhance the implementation of the BWC. These States Parties, many of whom are sitting in this room, insisted that a vacuum in the period until the next Review Conference in 2006 would be detrimental for the Convention and for our fight against the biological weapons threats confronting the international community, also as these threats are exacerbated by the scourge of terrorism. To this end, South Africa would support a proposal at the reconvened meeting of the Review Conference that would include:

- The rapid conclusion of the Review Conference's work with a focus on future work to enhance the implementation of the Convention, also without raising divisive issues where it is known that agreement will not be possible;
- No reference to the BWC Ad Hoc Group and its draft Protocol in the final documents of the Review Conference;
- Agreement to establish a Group or Groups of Experts to deal with a limited and non-exhaustive list of specific issues related to the Convention and to consider and reach agreement on proposals that could enhance the implementation of the Convention;
- Annual meetings of the Group or Groups of Experts for a period of approximately four weeks in two separate periods. If there is time still available after the reconvened meeting of the Review Conference in November has completed its work, then the remaining time could be used by the newly established Expert Group or Groups to begin an initial consideration of their work;
- Annual meetings of the States Parties for a limited duration of time (a few days) that would consider the work of the Group or Groups and decide upon further work once issues had been dealt with. The annual meeting should coincide with one of the periods of time that have been allocated for a meeting of the Expert Group or Groups; and,
- The possible strengthening of the UN Secretariat in the area of biological weapons so as to assist the States Parties, especially from developing countries, in the abovementioned work.

Mr. Chairperson,

With respect to the Chemical Weapons Convention the past year has proved to be somewhat of a challenge. The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) has been required to deal with difficult institutional challenges which have resulted in a lack of focus on the core business of the Organisation. South Africa is gratified that these difficulties now appear to have been resolved, and we take this opportunity to wish Ambassador Rogelio Pflirter every success in his new role as Director-General of the OPCW. The OPCW has also once again faced the challenge of under-funding in 2002. The upcoming Conference of States Parties in The Hague will seek to approve a budget that accurately reflects the needs of the Organisation to fulfil its mandate of ensuring the complete elimination of chemical weapons. The principle of "the possessor pays" has been clearly defined in the Convention and those countries that do possess such weapons must accept the responsibility they have brought upon themselves by developing these weapons in the first place. The world's only disarmament treaty dedicated to the elimination of an entire category of weapons of mass destruction must not be allowed to falter because of attempts by possessors to engage in creative accounting. Given the international security climate and the widely acknowledged fact that chemical weapons are an easy option in the terrorist's arsenal, the Member States of the Chemical Weapons Convention need to ensure that the OPCW focuses very clearly and effectively on its core functions of destruction and non-proliferation of chemical weapons.

Mr. Chairperson,

South Africa welcomes the decision by Iraq to unconditionally allow the United Nations and International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors into that country so as to fulfil their task on the verification of the destruction of the weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and WMD capabilities in accordance with the decisions of the Security Council. The situation in Iraq, including its non-compliance with international non-proliferation obligations – particularly as this related to Iraq’s obligations under the BWC and the NPT as well as their use of chemical weapons and missile delivery systems – has been a source of concern for the international community. The completion of the investigations into, and verification of, the destruction of Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction capabilities has been much delayed, and South Africa would call on Iraq to come into full compliance with its obligations in this regard.

The situation in the Middle East, as is the case in South Asia, is made more complex by the aspirations of States in these regions to weapons of mass destruction. South Africa reiterates its call on these States, as well as States in other regions of the world, to all become parties to the international agreements on disarmament and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and to also comply with international norms against the proliferation of missile delivery systems. Recent history has repeatedly shown, as was the case with South Africa itself, that security is not provided by the continued retention of, or aspiration to, these weapons. The possession of nuclear weapons by the apartheid Government in South Africa was rather a source of instability, destabilisation and continued conflict in our region.

Mr. Chairperson,

The success of the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects is measured in terms of the commitment by States to implement the measures contained in the Programme of Action.

The numerous initiatives that have been undertaken nationally and regionally to facilitate the implementation of the Programme of Action is evidence of the growing political will to effectively and comprehensively address the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects.

South Africa has on a national basis continued with its programme to destroy surplus and confiscated small arms. In addition, South Africa together with Austria, Canada, Kenya, Mali, The Netherlands, Nigeria, Norway, Switzerland and the United Kingdom successfully co-hosted the “African Conference on the Implementation of the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms: Needs and Partnerships” that was held from 18-21 March 2002 in Pretoria. The Conference had its objectives to recap on the commitments in the UN Programme of Action and those compatible elements of Africa’s Bamako Declaration, and to examine how national, sub-regional and international implementation processes can be supported by African and OECD countries, as well as non-governmental organisations.

African participants at the Conference also noted that for Africa, preventing, combating and eradicating the illicit proliferation of small arms and light weapons is a key element to promoting long-term security and creating conditions for sustainable development, which is a cornerstone of the “New Partnership for Africa’s Development”, also known as NEPAD.

Mr. Chairperson,

Japan, Colombia and South Africa will again submit a draft resolution on “The Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in all its aspects”. One of the issues addressed in this draft resolution is the first biennial meeting to be held in terms of the Programme of Action. South Africa is of the view that this meeting should primarily focus on exchanging information on the national, regional and global implementation of the Programme of Action by all concerned, including international and regional organisations, as well as non-governmental organisations. To facilitate the organisational planning of the meeting it is important that an informal understanding be reached during this First Committee Session on who will chair the meeting.

Mr. Chairperson,

South Africa is pleased with the outcome of the recently held Fourth Meeting of States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on their Destruction. We believe that the Mine Ban Treaty has irreversibly established itself as the international norm in banning anti-personnel mines. This is demonstrated by the fact that since the Third Meeting of States Parties in Managua in September 2001, an additional nine States have formally committed themselves to the MBT bringing the total number of States Parties to one hundred and twenty nine.

The ratification of the Treaty by Angola in June this year, as the last Member of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) sub-region to do so, makes the SADC, which is one of the most mine affected regions in the world. Also one of the first sub-regions, as a whole, to formally adhere to the MBT. SADC’s objective of becoming a mine-free region has therefore taken a significant step forward and we sincerely hope that this ambition will become a reality within a short period of time.

South Africa welcomes the progress that has been achieved in addressing the humanitarian objectives of the Treaty, which have been greatly facilitated by the intersessional work programme. However, this success would not have been possible without the enabling support of the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) as well as the Implementation Support Unit (ISU) and the active participation of all concerned, including the numerous organisations involved in mine action, the ICBL, the ICRC and the United Nations.

Mr. Chairperson,

South Africa believes that the successful outcome of the Second Review Conference of the Certain Conventional Weapons Convention (CCW) has strengthened the Convention as a viable instrument of international humanitarian law, which could proactively address various conventional weapons deemed to be excessively injurious or to have indiscriminate effects. With the extension of the Convention's scope of application to also cover conflicts not of an international character, South Africa believes that the focus should now be placed on negotiating an instrument that would effectively deal with the issue of explosive remnants of war.

Mr. Chairperson,

South Africa remains committed to the work of this Committee and of all other disarmament and non-proliferation fora, so as to achieve the total elimination of all weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems, and to limiting the number of conventional weapons to the minimum required for self-defence. South Africa recognises that the negative picture that has been sketched in the earlier parts of this statement may be a cause for becoming disheartened and for being tempted to walk away, so as to spend our valuable human and other resources on issues that could provide a faster and less difficult return. South Africa, however, continues to recognise the critical importance of the issues we deal with for international peace and security – not only in our time, but also in the time of generations to come. South Africa therefore remains determined to continue to work – singly or in co-operation with other like-minded countries -- for the achievement of our common goals, whether it is to prevent the illicit trafficking of a single hand gun that is used to threaten even one individual or whether it is to prevent the continued existence of the most sophisticated nuclear-tipped ballistic missile that threatens mass destruction.

Mr. Chairperson, I thank you.