



**STATEMENT BY
H.E. DR GRACE NALEDI MANDISA PANDOR
MINISTER OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
AND COOPERATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA
TO THE
HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT OF THE
2024 CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT**

27 FEBRUARY 2024

Mr President,

I thank you for the opportunity to address this august body and congratulate you on your stewardship of the Conference. You can be assured of my country's support.

South Africa aligns itself with the statements to be delivered by the distinguished delegations of New Zealand on behalf of the New Agenda Coalition (NAC), and by Zimbabwe on behalf of the Group of 21 (G-21).

Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

This High-Level Segment of the Conference on Disarmament takes place against the backdrop of an increasingly precarious international environment marked by sharp divisions, rising conflict, military confrontation and the deterioration of global peace and security. We are witnessing the widespread destruction of lives and livelihoods where innocent civilians, including women and children, have become primary victims, with scant, if any, regard to international law, as we have seen of late in Gaza.

Compounding this situation is the increasing salience of nuclear weapons in military postures and doctrines, expanding nuclear weapon modernisation programmes and an increase in the threat of use of nuclear weapons in multiple acute crises.

Instead of the world redoubling its efforts to create a peaceful, safe, and enabling environment for all, as we grapple with the harmful effects of climate change and other trans-national threats, we find ourselves deeper in crises purely created by mankind that leads to an even greater humanitarian catastrophe and which undermine all attempts to restore global peace and security.

South Africa believes that the Conference on Disarmament, as the single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum of the international community, can and should execute its responsibility by addressing prevailing realities which threaten global peace and security, rather than being a victim of ongoing conflicts and crises.

South Africa remains a strong proponent of disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control and an ardent supporter of a world free from the threats posed by weapons of mass destruction and the excessive accumulation of and illicit trafficking in conventional arms.

To this end, I am pleased to inform the Conference that South Africa has just yesterday handed over the country's Instrument of Acceptance of the Amendment to the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material (CPPNM) at a ceremony held at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). South Africa signed the original Convention in May 1981 and ratified it in September 2007. This is a demonstration of my country's unwavering commitment to nuclear security and the protection of nuclear material while continuing to support broader efforts to promote nuclear disarmament, nuclear non-proliferation and the inalienable right of States to develop and use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.

In this spirit, we will continue to contribute to the work of this important institution.

Mr President,

Nuclear threats continue to bring forth the potential use of nuclear weapons and the ensuing humanitarian impacts.

No State should think that they are entitled to possess weapons that pose such a grave and existential threat to humanity. It must be reiterated when addressing the issue of nuclear weapons that it is not strategic stability among the nuclear-weapon States that is paramount but rather the catastrophic consequences that any use of nuclear weapons would inflict on all peoples and the environment. It is imperative that we finally remove the threat of nuclear weapons through their total elimination. We, therefore, call upon all States possessing nuclear weapons to make the right choice to work towards the total elimination of these inhuman weapons urgently. We further call on other States under the nuclear umbrella and those part of nuclear alliances, to refrain from giving value to these weapons. Such actions only serve to encourage proliferation and bring about increased insecurity for all.

Mr President,

The grave geopolitical situation and growing global insecurity and instability must be addressed urgently. This requires collective multilateral decisions, demonstrating the importance of global governance and respect for and adherence to international law. International security cannot be achieved by one or a few States acting alone. The international community has to work together on these shared challenges.

This underscores the need for the Conference of Disarmament to overcome the current impasse and take the urgent action that is needed to commence its substantive work in the field of disarmament.

The Conference on Disarmament and its predecessors have in the past negotiated major multilateral arms limitation and disarmament agreements such as the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC); the Chemical Weapons Convention, and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT). While the international security environment adds challenges to our work in the Conference on Disarmament, it must be noted that some of these indispensable instruments were adopted at the height of the Cold War and illustrate what is possible when the Member States of this Conference work together in their collective interest.

Collectively, Members of the Conference hold the key to unlock this body's true potential. The key challenge that we currently face is the absence of political will. My delegation regrets that the Conference on Disarmament this year, once again, seems to be unable to find consensus on its Programme of Work. My appeal today is for all Members of this body to show flexibility and to work constructively towards the adoption of a Programme of Work that would allow the Conference to execute its mandate.

We consider that there are items on the agenda of the Conference on Disarmament where substantive negotiations may commence, amongst others on a fissile material treaty, a treaty on the prevention of an arms race in outer space, as well as other effective measures towards nuclear disarmament. Some of these are long overdue and further delays will only serve to contribute to an arms race and create new areas of conflict. The mere act of negotiation can also help to rebuild trust among States, something that is desperately needed.

Mr President,

Disarmament measures affect the vital security interests of all States. Accordingly, all States must have the opportunity to be actively engaged with and contribute to disarmament efforts. We were disheartened that the Conference was not able to reach an agreement regarding the participation of some non-members as observers in the 2024 session of the CD. I wish to reiterate my country's commitment to ensuring inclusiveness through the participation of all interested States in the work of the CD, reaffirming the importance of multilateralism and the principle of inclusivity in the work of the Conference on Disarmament. The Conference will need to urgently review the expansion of membership to be more representative and more relevant in the current context.

In conclusion Mr President, common threats can only be effectively addressed through enhanced international co-operation and strong international institutions that can respond to our collective security concerns. We are bound by our collective commitment to advance substantive negotiations on priority questions of disarmament, especially nuclear disarmament. Let me reiterate that the deteriorated international security environment that we find ourselves in can be dealt with through the disarmament structures we have at hand. Addressing the challenges should ensure peace and security for all resulting in increased prosperity and development.

I thank you.