



**First Committee of the 79th UN General Assembly
Cluster I – Nuclear Weapons**

**Statement by H.E. Leonardo Bencini
Permanent Representative of Italy to the Conference on Disarmament**

New York, 21 October 2024

Chair,

Italy fully aligns itself with the statement delivered by the European Union. I will make some additional remarks in my national capacity.

Chair,

Since last year's session of this Committee, the international security context has further deteriorated. Some commentators even maintain that we have entered a new nuclear age and that – if the main players prove unable or, in some cases, unwilling to return to the negotiating table – we might be on our way towards a new nuclear arms race. This would mean the unravelling of the disarmament, arms control and non proliferation architecture built over the past decades.

Italy firmly believes that there is no alternative to the multilateral system and we view the very recent adoption of the Pact for the Future as proof that this belief is in fact almost universally shared. We welcome Action 25 of the Pact that reaffirms foundational principles such as the one according to which a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought. With Action 25, States parties recommitted to the goal of a world completely free of nuclear weapons and to strengthening the disarmament and non proliferation architecture. These are principles and goals that Italy has always maintained and defended.

Italy believes that the goal of complete nuclear disarmament can be achieved through a progressive, realistic, pragmatic and responsible approach. This

approach should be based on concrete measures and an effective, verifiable and irreversible process, in a way that promotes international stability based on the principle of undiminished security for all.

Action 25 of the Pact for the Future also states that, while we work towards the final objective of complete nuclear disarmament, the immediate goal is the elimination of the danger of a nuclear war and the prevention of an arms race. To achieve this, Italy believes that dialogue must be preserved and mutual trust restored to the maximum extent possible.

In this context, we welcome transparency measures already taken by France, the United Kingdom and the United States and call on others to show the same level of transparency. Italy strongly supports strategic and nuclear risk reduction initiatives. Far from being a substitute for nuclear disarmament, risk reduction is a necessary tool to, among other things, build trust and foster a climate conducive to disarmament negotiations. Nuclear risk reduction can pave the way for disarmament and should be pursued in parallel with it, each reinforcing the other.

Italy maintains that nuclear weapons, for as long as they exist, should only serve defensive purposes, deter aggression and prevent war and coercion. Last June, the Apulia G7 Leaders' summit under Italian presidency condemned in the strongest possible terms Russia's irresponsible and threatening nuclear rhetoric, as well as its posture of strategic intimidation, including its announced deployment of nuclear weapons in Belarus.

Chair,

After two NPT Review Conferences without a substantive final document, it is imperative, and it should be every delegation's priority, that this process be put back on a consensual track. In spite of diverging positions on several points, we still believe there are areas where consensus can be achieved, as was evident at the X Review Conference, two years ago, when only the Russian Federation blocked consensus on the draft Final document.

The prompt entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty remains one of our key priorities. During Italy's co-Presidency of the Conference on Article XIV, eight new countries acceded to the Treaty. We call upon States that have not yet done so – in particular the now nine annex II States – to sign and ratify the Treaty without any further delay. In the meantime, we call upon all States to respect the moratorium on nuclear test explosions. It must be clear to all that breaking the moratorium would cause irreparable harm to the global security architecture.

Italy is glad to have joined a cross-regional group of friends of the FMCT together with Japan and other countries. We are working within this group to give new impetus to the goal of starting negotiations on an FMCT without delay. We also look forward to the discussions to be conducted within the recently established Subsidiary Body 2 of the Conference on Disarmament. It is high time we broke the deadlock on an FMCT. Different views on existing stocks should not prevent an immediate start of negotiations within the CD. In the meantime, we call on all relevant States to abide by a moratorium.

Chair,

Nuclear proliferation risks are very real. Italy urges Iran to return to the full implementation of all its obligations under the JCPOA. We also call on Iran to ensure full and transparent cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency to stop assisting Russia's war in Ukraine and not to transfer ballistic missiles and related technology, as this represent a substantive material escalation and a direct threat to European security.

We are also seriously concerned about a possible resumption of nuclear testing by the DPRK. We urge the DPRK to refrain from further provocations and to take concrete steps towards a complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization; to return to the NPT; to fully comply with IAEA safeguards and to sign and ratify the CTBT.

I thank you, Chair.