Draft Statement
of
the African Group
on the occasion of the Third Conference on the
Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons

Vienna, Austria, 8-9 December 2014

Chairperson,

1. The Africa Group congratulates Austria for hosting this important conference dealing with the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons and assures you of the cooperation and support in your endeavours. This Conference builds on the work that has been undertaken, which has served to place this significant issue firmly on the international agenda. Indeed, despite the long-standing international recognition accorded to this issue, it has only recently occupied prominence in discussions on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, which have been dominated by narrow national security concerns.

2. The Group recalls that the outcome 2010 NPT Review Conference expressed, among others issues, “deep concern at the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons”. Following the 2010 outcome, a number of initiatives were undertaken to build on that momentum in advancing the issues to be highlighted at this Meeting, including those expressed at the previous two Conferences held in Oslo and Nayarit.

3. The outcome of these last two Conferences, have clearly highlighted the fact that, no State or international organisation, has the capacity to deal with the devastating consequences of a nuclear weapons detonation, including the aftermath as well as the high risks associated with such detonation, whether by accident, miscalculation or design. In this regard, the Group calls on this gathering to continue to build a greater understanding of this theme in order to take the discussions forward as we prepare for the IXth Review Conference of the NPT in 2015.

4. The Group reiterates that humanitarian imperatives lie at the heart of the call for a world free of nuclear weapons and remains deeply concerned about the lack of meaningful progress towards this goal, despite the various undertakings and commitments made by the Nuclear Weapon States to this end. This was not what the international community envisaged when the UN General Assembly adopted its first resolution in 1946, which sought to initiate a process to achieve “the elimination from
national armaments of atomic weapons and of all other major weapons adaptable for mass destruction”.

5. There are more than 16,400 nuclear weapons in existence today, with allocation of vast resources to retain and modernize them, contrary to international aspirations to the contrary, as expressed by world leaders at the turn of the century. Similarly, nuclear weapons remain integral to the military and security doctrines of a number of States, in a world where the basic human needs of billions remain unfulfilled. Nuclear Weapons States commit unsustainable resources to development and retention of these weapons, rather than direct the much-needed resources towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Post-2015 Global Development Agenda, with the objective of positively moving forward the unfinished business of the MDGs.

6. Africa has consistently promoted the achievement and maintenance of a world free of nuclear weapons, as enshrined in the Treaty of Pelindaba, which was initiated in the early 1960s with our efforts to denuclearize the African Continent. These endeavours, in particular, were informed by the continent’s experience of the devastating nuclear tests undertaken on African soil, together with the constant danger associated with the Apartheid bomb. As such, the African Group believes that these weapons of mass destruction are not only immoral but also illegal. They serve to undermine international humanitarian law and international peace and security.

7. In this regard, the Group submits that the current state of affairs on nuclear disarmament remains unacceptable. Given the death and destruction that would result from detonation of nuclear weapons, the African group believes that the current state of affairs remains unsustainable and wholly unacceptable. We hope that this Conference will not only serve to deepen global awareness, but also ensure that humanitarian considerations remain at the heart of all discussions, decisions and actions on nuclear weapons. As part of this process therefore, it becomes pertinent for this Conference and the developments that flow from it to ultimately contribute to the commencement of “negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament”, and in keeping with the spirit and letter of Article VI of the NPT, which reflects the international community’s call to act on this issue since 1946.

I thank you, Chairperson.