STATEMENT BY MICHAEL A.O. OYUGI, AMBASSADOR/PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE REPUBLIC OF KENYA TO THE UNITED NATIONS OFFICE, VIENNA, DURING THE VIENNA CONFERENCE ON THE HUMANITARIAN IMPACT OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS HELD ON 8 - 9 DECEMBER, 2014 IN VIENNA, AUSTRIA

Co-Chairs,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I take this opportunity on behalf of the Kenya delegation to express our sincere appreciation to the Government of Austria and in particular His Excellency Mr. Sebastian Kurz, Federal Minister for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs of Austria, for hosting this important conference.

Co-Chairs,

Next year marks the 70th Anniversary since nuclear weapons were used for the first time, in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Lessons from that experience clearly showed that, even the use of a single nuclear weapon results in catastrophic short, medium, and long-term humanitarian consequences. In this respect, we heard before us right in this hall, the testimony of a survivor of this catastrophe, Ms Setsuko Thurlow. She shared with us harrowing and unforgettable details of first-hand experience of the horrors of the atomic bomb. If at all there were still any doubts about the extreme and indiscriminately destructive nature of nuclear weapons, these were cleared with the stories of the other three survivors narrated at this forum.

Presentations by various experts also reminded us of the extensive global destructive capacity of nuclear weapons. Hence in the event of a nuclear explosion from whatever cause, questions arise as to provision of assistance to victims. There is simply no state or organization with a plausible capacity or the means to assist victims of nuclear weapons, or provide protection to those delivering assistance. Moreover, it would not be possible to establish such capacities, even if the international community attempted to. This notwithstanding, nuclear weapon States are still not willing to let go of their weapons. We are indeed deeply concerned with the continued lack of progress in the global nuclear disarmament agenda.
The consequences and risks of nuclear detonation therefore underline the need for urgent action. My delegation supports early commencement of substantive work on a legally binding instrument for the achievement and maintenance of a world free of nuclear weapons.

Co-Chairs,

Kenya remains concerned with the apparent continued channeling of public funds towards the maintenance and modernization of nuclear arsenals to the detriment of promotion of mutually beneficial international economic cooperation and other peaceful international activities. The Humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons should be a key concern to all of us. The effects of these weapons are not constrained by national borders or geographical divides however expansive.

Beyond the immediate death and destruction caused by a nuclear detonation, socio-economic development will be hampered, the environment will be damaged. At the same time, reconstruction of infrastructure and regeneration of economic activities, trade, communications, health facilities, and schools would take several decades, if at all. Radiation exposure could result in short and long-term negative effects in every organ of the human body and would increase cancer risks, and future hereditary pathologies. Therefore, this is an issue of shared concern.

Co-Chairs,

Africa remains a nuclear free zone as established by the Treaty of Pelindaba, and therefore, remains committed to the goal of nuclear disarmament, and to legal obligations under Article VI of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Despite Africa being a nuclear free zone, we on the continent are concerned that today the risk of nuclear weapons use is growing globally as a consequence of proliferation, the vulnerability of nuclear command and control networks to cyber-attacks and to human error, and potential access to nuclear weapons by non-state actors, in particular terrorist and extremist groups. More countries have deploy more nuclear weapons on higher levels of combat readiness, and therefore the risks of accidental, mistaken, unauthorized or intentional use of these weapons has grown significantly.

Co-Chairs,

The Oslo, Nayarit and Vienna conferences on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons have significantly contributed to a paradigm shift away
from security concerns, to humanitarian concerns as a basis for nuclear disarmament. This has created a new dimension to the whole debate on nuclear disarmament. There seems to be a growing momentum towards nuclear disarmament, and also a growing consensus that the Conference on Disarmament remains the preferred multilateral fora for pursuing multilateral nuclear disarmament.

The overwhelming support by States, international organizations and civil society organizations for these conferences on humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons imperative demonstrates the growing opposition to the constant threat posed globally by nuclear weapons. As my delegation stated at the general debate of the First Committee during the 69th Session of the United Nations General Assembly “People are beginning to stand up. Very soon they will say ‘enough’. Every citizen of the world community has the right and duty to oppose the existence of nuclear weapons. Naturally, the talk of banning nuclear weapons is the next logical step. It should not cause anxiety”.

In conclusion Co-Chairs, Kenya is convinced that the very adverse humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons can help de-legitimize nuclear weapons. We therefore reiterate that it is time for States to start working on a legal ban on nuclear weapons.

I thank you.