We welcome advances made during the past year in strengthening the international rule of law in the multilateral disarmament and international security environment. However, much remains to be done. Progress on the various undertakings towards disarmament has yet to be realised. Of particular concern to South Africa is the continuing impasse in the UN disarmament machinery established under the First Special Session of the General Assembly devoted to Disarmament in 1978. The prolonged stalemate in the Conference on Disarmament (CD) and the lack of agreement in the UN Disarmament Commission are weakening the multilateral system. These bodies need to be revitalized so that they can again discharge their respective mandates.

Of particular concern to my delegation is the 18-year stalemate in the Conference on Disarmament (CD). At the heart of the problem lies the continued resistance by a small number of States to implement their disarmament obligations and to subject themselves to the international rule of law. As a country committed to the resumption of substantive work in the CD, we have exercised the greatest level of flexibility and again supported proposals that stop far short of what we would deem optimum solutions. We did so on the understanding that such deliberations may pave the way for eventual negotiations.

We commend all the Presidents of the 2014 CD Session for their efforts to develop a programme of work. We also thank the Secretary-General of the CD for his innovative proposals on the future work of the CD to revitalize it so as to turn the tide. In particular, we welcome the establishment of the Informal Working Group to develop a programme of work in accordance with CD/1974 and decision CD/1978 on a Schedule of Activities that allowed the CD to undertake informal discussions on the items on its agenda. While some may have supported these efforts with the aim of creating the illusion of movement in the CD, our support was informed by our desire to explore all avenues aimed
at the resumption of negotiations and we will continue to do so during the coming year.

Chairperson,

The UN Disarmament Commission (UNDC) concluded the third year in its three-year cycle in April this year with the adoption of merely a procedural report. While working papers by delegations and non-papers by the Chairs were circulated and elements thereof discussed in the two working groups, the one being on "Nuclear Disarmament and Non-Proliferation" and the other on "Confidence-Building Measures in the Field of Conventional Weapons", no consensus could be reached on the non-papers of the respective working group Chairs. Discussions were mostly long on procedure and short on substance and not very focused on the various papers. In spite of initial expectations that the session would be able to build on initial work done during the last three years, we had managed to make progress, but this was not enough to reach a set of substantive recommendations to the General Assembly.

With each passing year, it has become clearer that the vast majority of UN Member States are exasperated with the lack of progress on nuclear disarmament. In October 2013, 125 countries aligned themselves with a Joint Statement delivered by New Zealand to the First Committee on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons. In February 2014, more than 145 countries met in Nayarit, Mexico for the second Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons, which will be followed by a similar gathering in Vienna, Austria in December 2014.

Last year, Member States actively participated in the Open Ended Working Group to take forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations, and the General Assembly convened a successful High Level Meeting on nuclear disarmament. The outcomes of the High Level Meeting and the Open Ended Working Group demonstrated what is indeed possible. They also provided the opportunity to move away from the disagreements that sometimes define other fora, towards the fuller consideration of the elements that will be required to achieve and maintain our shared commitment to a nuclear-
weapon-free world. Rather than serving as a so-called distraction, these initiatives have injected new energy into the work of the multilateral fora.

Negotiations are essential if we are to strengthen the international rule of law, which is key to promoting peace and security, where all countries – developing and developed – are able to play by the same rules. Such negotiations are vital if we are to achieve the requisite progress on nuclear disarmament that the world community seeks.

Chairperson,

In 2011, South Africa, together with the Netherlands and Switzerland put forward a resolution aimed at the revitalisation of the multilateral disarmament machinery. This resolution, 66/66, was adopted by consensus and resolved to explore, consider and consolidate options, proposals and elements for revitalising the UN disarmament machinery, including the CD. We therefore welcome the various initiatives launched during the past year. With further activities planned for 2015, South Africa believes that solutions can be found and that multilateral governance and the international rule of law in the area of disarmament could be strengthened. South Africa will remain actively and constructively engaged in the CD and other multilateral disarmament fora with a view to seeking solutions.

In concluding, Chairperson,

My delegation wishes to recognise the important role and contribution of civil society in the field of disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control. It is our hope that interaction between governments, members of civil society and academia could be further enhanced so that we can all benefit from the variety of insights and ideas presented by the different constituencies.

I thank you.