



BELGIUM

Statement for the General Debate

UN General Assembly 78

First Committee

New York, October 2023

Chair,

First of all, I wish to congratulate you on the assumption of the chairmanship of this year's First Committee meeting and I want to assure you of the full support of my delegation.

Belgium fully aligns itself with the statement made by the European Union.

Belgium condemns with the utmost vigor the terrorist attacks perpetrated by Hamas against Israeli civilians since Saturday morning, as well as the kidnapping of innocent hostages.

Such practices benefit no one: they affect both Israeli and Palestinians, as they expose them to violence and further undermine the possibility of a negotiated political solution. Belgium calls for the respect of international humanitarian law. In all circumstances. Everywhere.

Chair,

The world is faced with stark choices. The foundation of the rules-based international order, the Charter of the United Nations, has been upended by one of the permanent members of the Security Council, Russia. Other treaties and agreements have been trampled on and dissolved. Democratic processes are in turmoil. The tenets of the current world order are being challenged. Harsh experience of the twentieth century however taught us the value of the principles upon which multilateralism is built. Norms, agreements and oversight create a buffer against a world disorder, where might is right and where the self interest of some prevails over the common interest of humanity. Today, the choice every nation makes will have an impact on how our world of tomorrow will be like.

In this context, neutrality over the war in Ukraine is not an option. One cannot provide lip service to the principles of national sovereignty and territorial integrity and at the same way look away from Russia's aggression, its illegal war and its blatant disregard of international humanitarian law and human rights.

In the pursuit of its self-interest, Russia is also shaking the underpinnings of the non-proliferation and disarmament regime. It has violated treaties and it unjustifiably attacks the credibility of international organizations. Here too, one cannot remain indifferent when the impartiality and neutrality of organizations are wrongfully put into question.

Belgium is extremely concerned over the reports that a State Party to the CTBT considers revoking its ratification of the Treaty. Such a decision would deal a systemic blow to the international non-proliferation regime. The international norm against nuclear tests forms an essential instrument in the fight against proliferation and the development of new types of nuclear weapons. Belgium calls on Russia not to head down this road.

Chair,

Proliferation crises take no leave of absence. North Korea's exponential expansion of its ballistic missile and nuclear programs calls for a united international response. Strict respect for the UN sanctions is critical in this regard, in particular by the permanent members of the Security Council who imposed these measures. We call on North Korea to finally change its course, to comply with the resolutions of the Security Council and to take the necessary steps towards denuclearization.

As we fear for another nuclear test, we are reminded of the crucial importance of the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. This is the only way to enforce a global and definitive ban on nuclear testing, verified by an international organisation. Without the CTBT the risk that new and more powerful nuclear weapons will be developed remains greater. Only a world without nuclear testing can lead to a world without nuclear weapons. We welcome recent accessions to the Treaty and call on all States, in particular the Annex II States, to join the CTBT without waiting for others to do so first.

Unfortunately, Iran does not heed the call of the international community to show more transparency and apply more restraint in its nuclear program. Moreover, it is actively undermining the capacity of the IAEA to effectively monitor the implementation of the JCPoA as well as its respect for its safeguards agreement. Here too, continued sanctions are an important tool to instill change of behavior. One can also draw a lesson about the importance of the Additional Protocol, which in the case of Iran would be a guarantee for effective control of the nuclear programme beyond any JCPoA expiry date.

As we move forward with the new review cycle of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, we call on all Parties to invest in topics such as nuclear risk reduction, disarmament verification and the strengthening of the CTBT. Progress towards the universalization of the NPT is also important,

and we urge Israel, India and Pakistan to choose the right side of history and to join the NPT as non-nuclear-weapon States.

Chair,

Chemical weapons are the only weapons of mass destruction employed in conflict during this 21st century. Their re-emergence on the battlefield, 10 years ago, is an intolerable turnback for international humanitarian law. 10 years later, the victims of these horrendous attacks still await the punishment of those responsible. Syria still is in non-compliance with its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention. Belgium calls upon Syria to cooperate with the OPCW and to shed full light on its chemical weapons programme. We reconfirm our confidence in the impartiality and expertise of the Technical Secretariat of OPCW.

Chair,

Conventional weapons continue to claim innocent lives. We therefore need to strengthen conventional arms control instruments. The Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention and the Cluster Munition Convention save lives, day after day. More States should join those treaties.

We also express our support for the resolution on Autonomous Weapon Systems, introduced by Austria, of which Belgium is an original co-sponsor. At the same time, we will continue efforts within the CCW to foster consensus on a normative framework regarding autonomous weapons systems.

Chair,

The prevention of an arms race in outer space as well as the preservation of a safe, secure and sustainable space environment is essential for strengthening international security and stability. International law, in particular the United Nations Charter, the UN Treaties on Outer Space and International Humanitarian Law, is applicable to outer space. Conducting space activities in accordance therewith is considered by Belgium as equally important as the mutually reinforcing role of transparency and confidence building measures (TCBMs), and the need to advocate for responsible behaviour in outer space. Addressing space threats to international peace and security through the comprehensive work undertaken within the OEWG in view to scale down the risk of misunderstandings, misperceptions, miscalculations, and unintended escalations is to be considered as a confidence building measure in itself. Belgium deeply regrets the absence of any outcome document by the OEWG, due to Russia's position. Belgium thanks all other participating members states for their constructive approach at the debate in the Working Group and their openness for cross-regional dialogue. Belgium is committed to sustaining the momentum generated by the OEWG and attaches great importance to the continuation of an open, inclusive, and multistakeholder dialogue on responsible behaviour in outer space.

Chair,

Over the past decade, the international community has made it clear that the international rules-based order should guide State behaviour in cyberspace. The overwhelming support for last year's resolution on the "Programme of Action to Advance Responsible State Behaviour in Cyberspace" (Cyber PoA) demonstrates a clear aspiration by a vast majority of States to promote peace and security in cyberspace through a permanent and inclusive mechanism. The PoA is the most adequate instrument to operationalize agreed norms, support national implementation and capacity-building, and strengthen engagement with the multistakeholder community. We support the follow-up resolution on the Cyber PoA, introduced by France this year, and call on all States to support the establishment of the PoA by 2026. We also thank the Secretary-General for his report on the PoA and support its recommendations. We look forward to dedicated sessions on the PoA within the framework of the OEWG on ICT.