

**International Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons
4 and 5 February 2013
Oslo, Norway**

Introductory Comments by Ambassador Mxakato-Diseko for Session II: “Wider impact and longer-term consequences”

Since the advent of democracy in South Africa, our position on nuclear weapons has been informed by the understanding that these weapons do not guarantee security, but rather detract from it, and that as long as these weapons exist, the danger remains that they may be used, whether by design or by accident.

These positions were shaped by the perspective of those who fought for our liberation, such as the late Oliver Reginald Tambo, former President of the African National Congress, who stated that *“these fundamental questions of our time [can]not be left to those who have nuclear weapons and to experts. To save themselves from destruction, the ordinary people who know nothing about trajectories of missiles or the techniques of splitting atoms have to take their destiny into their own hands”*.

I am therefore delighted to be able to contribute to this important initiative, which seeks to put a human face to the catastrophic consequences associated with the use of nuclear weapons. By considering these consequences, we are indeed taking our destiny into our own hands. By reframing the debate in this way, we are moving away from a *status quo* that is fixated on the narrow security concerns of certain States, towards allowing all States to assume their rightful place at the table.

It is clear that the impact of a nuclear weapon detonation will not be limited in space and time. Beyond the immediate humanitarian disaster, there will also be wider impacts and longer-term consequences with regard to social and economic infrastructure, food security, public health and the environment.

In developing a fact-based understanding of these wider impacts and longer-term consequences, we are able to draw on analogous natural disasters such as major earthquakes, the nuclear incidents at Chernobyl and Fukushima, earlier nuclear tests and indeed also the actual use of nuclear weapons on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

We are meeting at a time when the world is struggling to meet the Millennium Development Goals and to reinvigorate the global economy in a more equitable manner. Yet a nuclear weapon incident will result in enormous economic costs emanating not only from the significant direct destruction it will cause, but also from the consequent economic disruptions and from the reaction costs. These costs will not be limited to the State where the detonation occurs, but would certainly disrupt the global economy which will not only result in reductions in development assistance, but also in the diversion of existing development assistance towards the more immediate disaster relief efforts.

While our focus is on the humanitarian impact of the use of a nuclear weapon, we would be remiss to ignore the developmental impact associated with expenditure on nuclear weapons. While the development assistance commitments in support of the achievement of the MDGs have yet to be realised, vast public resources are diverted to produce, maintain and modernise nuclear arsenals, which in 2010 amounted to more than double the

development assistance provided to Africa. This state of affairs is clearly unacceptable and unsustainable in a world where the basic human needs of millions cannot be met.

During December 2011, in Durban, the Parties to the Framework Convention on Climate Change again recognized that climate change represents an urgent and potentially irreversible threat to human societies and the planet and thus requires to be urgently addressed by all Parties. Against this backdrop, the climate disruption and related nuclear famine arising from even a limited nuclear war cannot be ignored. The smoke and dust generated by a nuclear incident would lead to abrupt global cooling which would restrict growing seasons and threaten agriculture. This in turn would lead to sharp hikes in food prices, making food inaccessible for the poor. Similarly, it would lead to the depletion of the ozone layer, increasing exposure to ultraviolet radiation, which would significantly undermine human and animal health, increasing crop damage and the destruction of marine life.

Africa knows all too well of the devastation associated with nuclear tests and has lived under the constant danger of the apartheid regime's nuclear capabilities. Africa's common position on the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free world, as enshrined in the Treaty of Pelindaba, was therefore forged at the time when newly independent African States sought to safeguard their hard-won freedom from the threat of nuclear annihilation.

Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah famously remarked on nuclear weapons that *"...Africa is not interested in such 'defence' which means no more than the ability to share in the honour of destroying mankind. We in Africa wish to live and develop. We are not freeing ourselves from centuries of imperialism and colonialism only to be maimed and destroyed by nuclear weapons"*.

This wish to *"to live and develop"* is common to humanity and will guide the discussions during this Session.