Statement by H.E. Archbishop Gabriele Caccia
Apostolic Nuncio, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations
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First Committee, First Cluster:
Nuclear Weapons, Other Weapons of Mass Destruction, Conventional
Weapons and Disarmament Aspects of Outer Space.

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Mr. Chair,

In his recent Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis touched on themes that provide
context for the importance of the work of this Committee: “Let us not,” he said, “remain mired
in theoretical discussions but touch the wounded flesh of the victims. Let us look once more
at all those civilians whose killing was considered ‘collateral damage.’ Let us ask the victims
themselves. Let us think of the refugees and displaced, those who suffered the effects of atomic
radiation or chemical attacks.”

With regard to the last group, recent reports of the use of nerve agents in various places in the
world point to the continued relevance of instruments prohibiting their use and possession.
The Geneva Protocol of 1925, the 1975 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention, and the
Chemical Weapons Convention of 1993 should provide a complete shield against such
weapons. More than a century after the use of chemical weapons in the First World War, the
nations of the world should be completely rid of them and should be pursuing steps—that
strengthen the implementation of legal measures for effective compliance in this regard. The
continuing COVID-19 pandemic is a stark and painful reminder of the crippling impact that
can be caused by novel biological agents, even of natural genesis. We should likewise not lose
sight of the threat of so-called “dirty bombs,” more properly radiological weapons, or of the
need for measures to prohibit the use of radiological materials as weapons.

Mr. Chair,

Many have lauded the five-year extension of the New START Treaty between the Russian
Federation and the United States of America. My Delegation looks forward, furthermore, to
rapid progress in the strategic dialogue that has already convened twice to consider further

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1 Pope Francis, Fratelli Tutti, 261.
reductions in nuclear weapons, both strategic and non-strategic, and the relevance of new technologies.

As the postponed fiftieth anniversary Review Conference of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) seems likely to take place in January, it is important that the P-5 Nuclear-Weapon-Possessing-States jointly consider and agree to steps that would complement those of the Russian Federation and the United States. It is time that nuclear weapon stockpiles be definitively capped, with further reductions among the P-5 to be taken below the cap. Of course, establishing a ceiling on the nuclear stockpiles of the other nuclear possessing states is also important. Our world is so interconnected that all nuclear weapons, wherever they may be, must be eliminated in the shortest feasible time, lest accident or miscalculation lead to catastrophic humanitarian and environmental consequences.² Pope Francis has emphasized, “the use of atomic energy for purposes of war is immoral, just as the possessing of nuclear weapons is immoral”³ since the intrinsic intentionality of having nuclear weapons is the threat to use them. In this regard, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) has established a legal prohibition on nuclear weapon possession, and will in due course be a basis for the Nuclear-Weapon-Possessing States to become parties upon eliminating their programs. For now, the current parties to the Treaty can work to develop the procedures that will be necessary for the verification authority or authorities established by the Treaty reliably to assure that the relevant nuclear weapons programs have indeed been eliminated.

The NPT explicitly recognizes that constraints must be imposed on conventional weapons in addition to nuclear weapons. Bearing in mind the role that nuclear deterrence, including extended nuclear deterrence, has played among States, further substantial efforts must be made to address conventional weapons. The world has in fact made progress in this regard, such as the Convention on Conventional Weapons, which has proved to be a durable agreement, with scope for further expansion, as evidenced by its protocols like those dealing with blinding lasers. Moreover, the growing threat of the use of armed drones and lethal autonomous weapon systems underscores the urgency to address the ethical necessity to preserve human responsibility.

Mr. Chair,

Conventional weapons have caused terrible harm globally since the end of the Second World War. This Committee needs to redouble its efforts to provide paths to agreements that will reduce the reliance on any conventional weapons to resolve disputes. These efforts will not only make nuclear disarmament more feasible, but they will moderate the interactions among States in their ongoing relations. Determined as we are to save succeeding generations from

³ Pope Francis, Meeting for Peace, Peace Memorial, Hiroshima, Japan, 24 November 2019.
the scourge of war,⁴ we cannot allow ourselves to be spectators to violence and war, to brothers killing brothers, as if we were watching games from a safe distance. The lives of peoples are not playthings. We cannot be indifferent onlookers.⁵ We cannot, as Pope Francis has said “continue to accept wars with the detachment with which we watch the evening news.”⁶

In conclusion, the Holy See wishes to state its conviction that outer space should remain the peaceful domain that it has been thus far in human history. While certain military uses of that environment have been deployed, such as communications, navigation, and monitoring, these are also critical for peaceful purposes. To weaponize this environment, either by deploying weapons, or by attacking space objects from the ground, would be extremely dangerous. Existing constraints on military uses of outer space, as embodied in the Outer Space Treaty, must be extended. The experience of long-lived orbital debris resulting from satellite destruction shows how foolish it would be to put space objects at risk for weapons use. Transparency and confidence-building measures, and legally binding instruments, should be promptly negotiated, so that the outer space environment remains safe for all of us.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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⁵ Cf. Pope Francis, Address at the Meeting of Religions for Peace, Rome, 7 October 2021.
⁶ Idem.