AUSTRALIA

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First Committee

Statement by

H.E. Mr Michael Smith
Ambassador and Permanent Representative
Australian Permanent Mission
to the United Nations in Geneva
and to the Conference on Disarmament

General Debate Statement

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AUSTRALIAN MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS
150 EAST 42ND STREET, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10017  TELEPHONE 212 351-6600
Mr Chairman

May I express the Australian delegation’s congratulations on your appointment as Chair of the Committee. We look forward to working closely with you over the coming weeks.

Few would disagree that the array of security challenges facing the world today highlights the need for strong international solidarity and resolve in dealing with threats. This forum is an important place to demonstrate our collective determination to strengthen international disarmament and non-proliferation norms and arrangements. We have a responsibility to ensure the First Committee remains a relevant and dynamic body in addressing current and emerging challenges to international peace and security.

Australia has been heartened by the strong international response to global terrorism after the tragic events of September 2001. The horror of those attacks infused last year’s First Committee with a more cooperative spirit. For our part, Australia continues to play an active role in international efforts to eradicate terrorism, the disturbing breadth and depth of which is becoming clearer over time. We must all maintain a high level of vigilance and a strong determination to address this grave threat.

We must also remain resolute in our collective determination to strengthen multilateral mechanisms to meet the threat posed by WMD and their delivery systems. We consider the continuing close engagement by member states in multilateral processes of vital importance to promoting security objectives. Multilateral mechanisms raise the bar against WMD proliferation by establishing norms and facilitating verification of compliance and they complement plurilateral, regional and national non-proliferation efforts and arrangements.

We all aware of Iraq’s attempts over many years to circumvent international norms against WMD proliferation. Australia considers that the international community cannot allow these violations to go unchecked and that firm action by the United Nations Security Council is required to rectify this situation. Getting inspectors back into Iraq, backed by a strong Security Council Resolution providing for full and unfettered access to all sites, is just the first step. We must remember that our goal remains disarming Iraq of its weapons of mass destruction. Apart from addressing the threat to international security posed by Iraq, we must avoid creating a precedent which other would-be proliferators might be tempted to exploit.

The proliferation of nuclear weapons remains one of the most serious challenges to global security. The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) serves as the cornerstone for global efforts seeking to curb the spread of such weapons and to work toward the goal of nuclear disarmament. Australia was particularly gratified by the recent announcement by Cuba that it would accede to the NPT, marking an important step toward universalisation. We take this opportunity to urge the three
states which remain outside the treaty to reconsider their position, and to take steps toward NPT accession.

Australia welcomed the outcomes of the First Preparatory Committee meeting of the 2005 NPT Review Conference which took place in April this year. While we see many challenges ahead in the 2005 review cycle, we take heart from positive developments. For example, US-Russian agreement on the Moscow Treaty is a tangible step towards realisation of NPT disarmament objectives.

The CTBT is a key element of the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation framework. Australia is determined to continue to work actively to bring the Treaty into force. In this respect, I draw your attention to the Joint Declaration Australia, Japan and the Netherlands launched in New York last month in support of the CTBT. The Declaration encouraged ongoing support for the development of the CTBT’s verification machinery, adherence to the treaty, and set out an action plan to expedite entry into force of the Treaty. We encourage other UN members to associate themselves with the declaration before it is submitted to the Secretary-General.

With 166 signatories and 94 ratifiers, there should be no doubt that the CTBT represents widespread recognition of a powerful international norm against nuclear testing. In this regard, Australia is pleased that a voluntary moratorium on nuclear testing continues to hold. We strongly urge all nuclear weapon and capable states to continue to uphold this moratorium.

The universal implementation of the IAEA’s strengthened safeguards system is another clear nuclear non-proliferation priority, and an area in which further headway can be made by the international community in the lead-up to the next NPT Review Conference. Achieving this objective would contribute significantly to a climate favourable to further cuts in nuclear arms. Australia is helping a number of regional countries with ratification and implementation of the Additional Protocols.

Australia applauds the recent efforts taken by the IAEA to counter the threat of nuclear terrorism through the work undertaken on the security and physical protection of nuclear material and facilities. Indeed, it was Australia’s privilege over this past year to chair the Board of Governors of the IAEA, and to be closely associated with these recent efforts. It is our firm view that, at this critical point in history, the momentum of the IAEA’s work must be maintained to allow it to deliver continued security benefits to the entire international community. In particular, we make a plea that the Legal and Technical Group considering an amendment to the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Materials work constructively and expeditiously to achieve a consensus text which strengthens the Convention.

Australia invites all states to support fresh attempts to achieve a breakthrough on commencement of negotiations on a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT). The negotiation of an FMCT is a priority disarmament and non-proliferation objective. It is disappointing that, despite repeated endorsement of proposals to negotiate a FMCT, after several years we are still no closer to the start of formal negotiations. We are encouraged that the Netherlands and other countries have undertaken informal discussions on FMCT issues. In the meantime, Australia and other cut-off treaty supporters
calls upon all relevant states to uphold moratoria on the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons purposes.

Australia is strongly committed to preventing the spread of chemical and biological weapons. We were disappointed that efforts last year to conclude a protocol to strengthen the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) proved unsuccessful and that the Fifth BWC Review Conference subsequently failed to agree on a forward program. In light of these setbacks, it is vital that momentum towards strengthening the BWC is renewed at the resumed Review Conference in November. Australia urges all states to increase their efforts to achieve practical and effective international measures promoting effective implementation of the BWC.

We are pleased that the difficulties which hampered the work of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical weapons (OPCW) have been resolved and that the OPCW is pursuing its objectives with renewed vigour. We reiterate our earlier calls for all states that have not signed and ratified the CWC to do so as soon as possible to ensure its enhanced effectiveness through universal membership.

Preventing the proliferation of ballistic missiles capable of delivering WMD is a key Australian priority. We welcome the Netherlands’ invitation to host a conference from 25-26 November to adopt the International Code of Conduct against ballistic missile proliferation. The Code represents an important practical step to address the problem of ballistic missile proliferation and build confidence at regional and global levels (and does not preclude further initiatives in the future). We urge all states to sign on to the Code.

Australia is proud to be associated with several initiatives in the conventional arms control field, which have delivered tangible benefits for the international community.

In the area of small arms and light weapons, Australia has been active in promoting implementation of the 2001 UN Programme of Action in our region. We urge all states to continue efforts towards implementation the Programme of Action in the lead up to the first biennial meeting of states scheduled for mid-2003.

The Ottawa Convention on anti-personnel landmines continues to grow in strength with a total of 130 countries having ratified or signed the Convention. Australia calls on those states which have yet to accede to do so as soon as possible, and to refrain from using anti-personnel mines in the interim. We welcome Thailand’s plans to host the meeting of States Parties next September. This will assist in raising the profile of landmines issues in the Asia-Pacific.

Australia was pleased with the positive outcomes achieved at the Second Review Conference of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) last December. Work this year at the experts level has demonstrated the adverse humanitarian consequences of explosive remnants of war (ERW) and we feel confident that states will agree to raise the tempo of consideration of ERW next year.
Mr Chairman,

In a fluid global strategic environment, we take this opportunity to highlight the need for all First Committee delegations this year to cultivate a similar level of cooperation to that evident at last year’s session. We should not let our inevitable differences of view allow us to lose sight of our shared commitment to the preservation and enhancement of international security. In this forum, we must be guided by the overarching goal of mobilising international support for practical measures that seek to address the existing, as well as emerging, threats to security. We therefore again stand ready to work closely and constructively with you and with all delegations over the coming weeks to help ensure a successful session.

Thank you.