Mr Chairman

The proliferation of nuclear weapons remains one of the most serious challenges to global peace and security. Australia as a non-nuclear weapon state is therefore strongly committed to efforts seeking to curb the spread of such weapons, and to working towards the goal of nuclear disarmament.

We meet at a time of serious challenge to the system of international treaties developed as a key defence against the spread of nuclear weapons. Over the past year North Korea has been found by the IAEA to be in non-compliance with its NPT safeguards obligations and has announced its withdrawal from the NPT. Serious unresolved concerns exist about the nature of Iran's nuclear program.

We should be clear on what is at stake. The non-proliferation regime provides vital security benefits. But more that this, dealing with nuclear proliferation is fundamental to the goal of nuclear disarmament. It is simply not possible to conceive of a world free of nuclear weapons in the absence of complete and permanent assurances of nuclear non-proliferation.

Australia welcomed the commitments given at the 2000 NPT Review Conference, and the constructive outcomes of the First and Second Preparatory Committee meetings for the 2005 NPT Review Conference. At next year's Third Preparatory Committee, and at the Review Conference in 2005, the interests of all NPT parties rest in working cooperatively to meet the challenges faced by the Treaty.

Australia welcomes, and is pleased to co-sponsor, Japan's resolution on 'A Path to the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons'. We particularly welcome those paragraphs in the resolution that give expression to the outcomes from the NPT 2000 Review Conference, and which underscore the importance of their full implementation. We hope the resolution will again attract wide cross group support, including from the nuclear weapon states.

Mr Chairman

Australia firmly believes that progress on nuclear disarmament is supported by steps all States can take to reinforce non-proliferation and disarmament goals.
All parties to the NPT share a responsibility to respect and strengthen the Treaty's verification mechanism – the IAEA safeguards system. Australia considers the Agency's strengthened safeguards system – the Additional Protocol – to be the current standard for NPT safeguards in non-nuclear weapon states. We would like to see the Additional Protocol come quickly to be an essential pre-requisite for nuclear supply.

Australia strongly supports the CTBT and is actively pursuing an ongoing program to secure further signatures and ratifications. We welcome reaffirmation by the September 2003 Article XIV Conference on Facilitating the Entry into Force of the CTBT of the essential role of the CTBT in strengthening global peace and security.

And while it is yet to enter into force, the CTBT has already made a powerful contribution to non-proliferation and disarmament. With 169 signatures and 106 ratifications, the treaty is a clear expression of the international community's collective will to halt nuclear weapon test explosions.

Australia is pleased to be lead co-sponsor with New Zealand and Mexico of the draft CTBT resolution. We hope the resolution will again attract wide support.

Mr Chairman

The international community has long identified the negotiation of a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT) as one of the most urgent disarmament and non-proliferation steps the international community should take. Yet, despite having been repeatedly endorsed by all States present here, FMCT negotiations have yet to commence. Australia therefore welcomes the tabling by Canada of the draft FMCT resolution. We very much hope this resolution will be adopted without a vote.

Mr Chairman

Australia looks forward to joining with other delegations in the course of First Committee in supporting resolutions that make a useful, practical contribution to our collective efforts towards nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.