UNGA 64 First Committee

16 October 2009

Thematic discussion on other weapons of mass destruction

Statement by Mr Paul Neville MP
Parliamentary Adviser to the Permanent Mission of Australia to the United Nations

(Check against delivery)

Mr Chairman

Australia is committed to a world free of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction which cause unconscionable casualties.

Achieving this goal demands steadfast commitment to strengthening the global treaties addressing weapons of mass destruction, such as the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC).

Australia welcomes the non-proliferation commitments and efforts made to address those risks. That cooperation has delivered measurable progress.

It has improved confidence and transparency in our capacity to combat proliferation of chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction.

Australia’s longstanding commitment to strengthening these efforts is undiminished.
_Australia Group_

In 1985, Australia convened a meeting of fifteen states to consider how to prevent the diversion of otherwise legitimate trade in chemicals and equipment to the production of chemical weapons. This meeting was in response to a UN special investigatory commission on the Iran-Iraq war which found that Iraq had used chemical weapons against Iran. The States involved in that 1985 meeting agreed to enhance cooperation and harmonise their respective licensing measures and export controls to ensure that their domestic chemical industries were not inadvertently helping other states develop chemical weapons.

The Australia Group has since expanded to 40 states and the European Commission today. Many countries that do not participate in the Australia Group have recognised the value of the Group’s comprehensive control lists in preventing dual-use chemical and biological materials, equipment and technology falling into the hands of proliferators. Consequently, an increasing number of non-participating countries look to Australia Group control lists and measures in the formulation of their own export controls.

Since its inception, the Australia Group has proved to be an important instrument in ongoing international efforts to impede the proliferation of chemical and biological weapons. The international community has also strengthened its efforts to rid the world of chemical weapons once and for all.

Mr Chairman

_Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC)_

The Chemical Weapons Convention has emerged as a cornerstone of the multilateral non-proliferation and disarmament architecture. It is crucial to our efforts to halt the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Membership of the Convention now stands at 188 countries, 12 years after entry-into-force, and is a testimony to the Convention’s relevance in today’s world.

Australia is encouraged by continuing progress in the destruction of chemical weapons which has resulted in the verified elimination of more than one third of declared stockpiles. Three former possessor states have completed destruction of all their chemical weapons. We urge the other four possessor states to make every effort to meet their extended deadlines for destruction.

It is now vital that all CWC member states look to the future to ensure that the CWC adapts to developments in science and technology. And we must guarantee that declaration and verification Protocols are strong and that full and effective implementation of the Convention is achieved.
Mr Chairman

*Biological Weapons Convention*

On a parallel front, the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention has led the improvement in international cooperation on biosecurity and bioterrorism.

Cooperative and constructive information exchanges, confidence building measures and regional and sub-regional cooperation have substantively improved implementation of the Convention.

Australia continues to work within our region with our neighbours to build regional capacity to counter bioterrorism and to advance biosafety. In the biosafety context, Australia has committed $100 million to combat the threat of pandemics and emerging infectious diseases in our region.

Mr Chairman

Black market activity, including illicit brokering and intermediation services, can circumnavigate the restrictions set out in the CWC, BWC and export control regimes.

Australia welcomes efforts to strengthen international curbs on illicit brokering activities. The success of the 2008 General Assembly of resolution “Preventing and combating illicit brokering activities” designed to combat illicit brokering in all its forms was a particularly positive achievement.

Australia’s continued determination to combat illicit brokering of weapons of mass destruction is undiminished, and we welcome the progress being achieved in this forum and the practical progress achieved in advancing international cooperation on export controls on dual use materials.

Mr Chairman

Australia continues to see an important role for both the CWC and the BWC in the global security architecture and as a tool for curbing the threat of chemical and bio-terrorism.

Importantly, both Conventions are also buttressing our efforts to implement fully UN Security Council Resolution 1540 and its successor resolutions.
We will continue in our efforts to support, strengthen and advance these key Conventions and measures.

I thank you.