Mr Chairman

Like others that have spoken before us, Australia would like to see the UN disarmament machinery function in the manner it was intended.

While we recognise that multilateral outcomes require political will, such outcomes also require a disarmament architecture that facilitates rather than impedes our capacity to meet these objectives.

The First Committee is an important forum in setting the agenda on non-proliferation and disarmament. In 2016, Australia was pleased to support resolutions on the establishment of a High-Level Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty Expert Preparatory Group, as well as a Group of Government Experts on nuclear disarmament verification. Progress on these two initiatives is currently underway, and we applaud
this. These were two examples where the disarmament machinery served as an enabler, not a disabler.

A further example was the consensus outcome in this year’s UN Disarmament Commission (UNDC), breaking a near two-decade long impasse. This, together with the consensus outcome of the SSOD IV open-ended working group, gives us real hope that member states can rally together and deliver tangible outcomes in our shared interests.

Mr Chairman

Less positive has been the ongoing struggle of the Conference on Disarmament to navigate a way forward on a program of work, now approaching two decades of paralysis. Although this year, we welcomed substantive discussions in the Way Ahead Working Group chaired by Myanmar – and we support building on this work to bring us closer to a Program of Work next year.

Mr Chairman

Australia underlines the need for more dialogue and bridge building at this critical juncture as we progress our agendas in Geneva, Vienna or New York.

By way of one specific example, we would like to see the relationship between the UN Disarmament Commission in New York and the UN Conference on Disarmament in Geneva strengthened. The UNDC is the deliberative body of the UN disarmament machinery and it should be presenting recommendations to the Conference on Disarmament to take forward. Clearly, this is not happening. Delivering consensus recommendations reached in the UNDC to the Conference on Disarmament could assist in building agreement on a constructive program of work for both bodies. In proceeding down this path, we would need to ensure the responsible use of the consensus principle in disarmament bodies to ensure our efforts are not stymied unnecessarily.

Australia will also be looking to work cross regionally on ideas to strengthen the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)
review process, including working with our colleagues within the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative (NPDI) to progress this agenda.

Mr Chairman

Australia is disappointed that a number of meetings under disarmament conventions have been shortened or cancelled over the past year due to funding shortfalls. We encourage all States to pay their assessed contributions in a timely manner to avoid further impacts on our work, and to support the development of new financial measures to prevent the recurrence of this problem. Sustainable funding is critical to workable disarmament machinery.

Finally, Australia is particularly pleased to co-chair, with Mexico, the newly established Vienna-based Group of Friends for Women in Nuclear. The Group aims to increase the representation of women in the International Atomic Energy Agency’s Secretariat, particularly in technical and senior management, by supporting practical initiatives in recruitment and career advancement, to help encourage an organisational culture in favour of gender equality.

Attaining gender parity is not only the right thing to do - it is also the intelligent thing to do to improve the functioning of the disarmament machinery. We hope that this initiative will resonate in other disarmament fora too.

I thank you, Mr Chairman