Mr. Chairperson,

I wish to begin by thanking General Cartwright and Mr. Ingram for their thought-provoking presentations. We have no doubts as to the catastrophic consequences that would ensue were even a single nuclear explosion to occur, whether by accident or design. Nor can we envisage any better world than one free of nuclear weapons.

We participate in this OEWG because we value the multilateral context as a means of addressing nuclear disarmament and because we see an unassailable merit to sharing national positions and ideas. All this, with the hope that we can arrive at a common understanding as to how best to take forward multilateral nuclear disarmament efforts at this time.

I say this because there have been instances in this gathering where we have veered from discussion and sharing of views to admonition and judgement of national positions.

There is an understandable frustration with the status quo with regard to nuclear disarmament. This is why we believe that the humanitarian initiative has offered a fresh and compelling paradigm for thinking about nuclear weapons and what they can do.

In many of our discussions we have frequently touched on nuclear deterrence and, depending on the national position, either dismissed it as an affectation of the past, or described it as a concept that retains validity today. Canada believes that the security dimension of nuclear weapons continues to apply – even as we seek realistic and viable measures to dispense with these weapons.

This is not a popular position, but we believe this concept must be taken into account when advancing any effective measure to deal with nuclear disarmament.
In contrast to those who have criticized states which maintain a belief in nuclear deterrence, Canada does not question the sincerity of the motives and aspirations of those states that see a ban as the next step in disarmament. Nor do we think them naïve. We take the advocates of a ban at their word; they wish to see the world rid of nuclear weapons. Indeed, we agree with them. A world free of nuclear weapons would be a better place.

On the other hand, Canada believes that we can only get to that better world by setting the right conditions. Why do we need the right conditions? To ensure that any measure, or measures, that this OEWG might recommend would matter if implemented. That they would have the desired consequences; that a tangible positive change would occur in the security of all states; and that differences between states would not be heightened making multilateral disarmament efforts even more difficult.

Fundamental to achieving these conditions are a reduction of tensions in regions of the world where nuclear possessor states are present, and an increase in confidence and trust between states in those regions. From there we could begin to focus on how to pursue nuclear disarmament with all parties involved.

Failing that, if the regional tensions are not reduced and confidence between states has not been boosted, than we are left with the present situation where some states are willing to forge ahead and adopt a measure or measures which – and I apologise if this seems uncharitable – may carry a certain satisfying symbolism, but would not be effective in reducing the number or posture of nuclear weapons held by possessor states.

From our perspective, such a measure would achieve far less than the expectations of its advocates, and would do nothing to address the need to defuse tensions between possessor states. In fact, with such a measure only applying to the willing, we see no impact on the behaviour or attitudes of nuclear weapon possessing states. In this light, while the measure would have arrived, its time would not truly have come. Furthermore, we continue to be concerned that there may be serious unintended
negative consequences for the NPT regime in the adoption of such a measure by only some states.

Likewise, just as we do not believe that non-nuclear weapon states should be outside looking in with nuclear disarmament negotiations conducted solely between nuclear weapon possessing states, so we are struck by the equally incongruous arrangement of having possessor states absent when solutions are being proposed to prohibit weapons they control.

Given that the conditions are not permissive for a major leap forward in disarmament through a measure such as a ban, Canada and others have advocated pursuit of effective measures that are already widely acknowledged by the majority of states, including most possessor states, as having real potential to advance disarmament; this includes pushing for CTBT ratification and commencing FMCT negotiations.

It would be a mistake to minimize what achieving these measures in the current security environment would represent in terms of steps forward. They do require ambition if we are to see progress and the obstacles to their advancement are a challenge. Nevertheless, staying with this path strikes us as the one most suited to our times.

While this approach may lack the popularity of some of the other measures we have discussed in this working group, this does not diminish its potential effectiveness.

With this in mind, we can only speculate on what could be accomplished if the creativity and drive of all the states participating in the OEWG were brought to bear on some of the measures we have listed.

Certainly, the unity of purpose and action that we have all championed in this room would be far closer to a reality and, in our estimation, with greater likelihood of effectively advancing nuclear disarmament.

Thank you.