CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Intervention on Panel II (c) of 26 February at OEWG by Australian Deputy Permanent Representation, Ian McConville:

Mr Chairman

Firstly, can I say a big thanks to John Borrie for his presentation. We also commend the research that you, as well as your UNIDIR colleagues, have put into the issue of the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons (HINW) over a sustained period.

As we know, a key objective in guiding our discussions throughout this week is for us to identify and formulate effective measures to progress multilateral nuclear disarmament. In relation to Panel II (C) in our “Progressive approach” paper, we have identified the promotion of disarmament and non-proliferation education, especially in states that possess nuclear weapons, as one initiative that can take this Panel II discussion forward on “increasing awareness and understanding of HINW”.

Disarmament education is an issue that has also been championed by the NPDI, but specifically, through the leadership of Japan, as we heard today.

I want to make a few remarks on the HINW issue itself. In particular, we are interested in ways this discourse can facilitate “effective measures”. Firstly, we salute the effort and energy that many delegations here have put into this initiative from its inception, including through the 3 HINW Conferences. And one key outcome is shifting the discussion of nuclear weapons for many delegations to include considerations based on evidenced based science. It is very difficult to argue with the proposition that the more facts we have at our disposal, then the more informed decisions can be. And it is self-evident that many more delegations have been apprised of information/facts and greater understanding of the consequences of a possible nuclear detonation, due to the work of those involved in the HINW initiative since 2010.

Indeed, this issue of education is directly relevant to our earlier discussion on “transparency”. If certain states have more information at their disposal on possible consequences that can further deepen our understanding on the “humanitarian consequences” issue, then this would be a worthy transparency measure these states could consider undertaking.

Another outcome is that the HINW debate has spurred on activity in other disarmament fora (perhaps not as significant and as fast as we would all like, but nevertheless, it has had an impact). This is quite a topical issue as we have the two concurrent processes underway as we speak: the annual cycle of the Conference on Disarmament (CD) and the OEWG. We have always maintained the two should be seen as leveraging off each other. We don’t see this is zero sum game: the synergies and the energy from the OEWG should be channelled into the CD.

In relation to other disarmament fora, such as the NPT RevCon and First Committee, we also agree that the HINW initiative has had an impact, including in relation to the various statements generated on the HINW. Colleagues will be aware of the statement delivered by Australia on behalf of 28 states at UNGA70, underlining both the humanitarian and security dimensions of nuclear weapons. We saw this as complementary, not in opposition, to the statement delivered by Austria at UNGA70.
And in this regard, I would like to strongly endorse the point made by our distinguished Japanese colleague this morning. The HINW should be an issue that unites, not divides. It should be a catalyst for action which drives us all forward, not which deepens divisions. And Mr Chairman, when we look at formulating agreed recommendations from the OEWG, we sincerely hope that we can find a way to bring different approaches together, united with our concern at the HINW.

Mr Chair, there has been much discussion on the issue of “security” this morning. As you have noted, John, this is a “vastly complicated debate”. As we have noted on several occasions this week, we do not raise resolution of global security hot spots as a pre-condition for progressing nuclear disarmament. But it is a factor, and if we turn a blind eye to this, we risk coming up with recommendations that will not get any “buy-in” from those states that we most want to bring into this process.

Question:

I now would like to direct a question at you John. You mentioned in your very last point that our challenge is find effective measures in the face of the “limitations” of the “step by step” process. I note one other delegation also made a similar comment in relation to the so called “step by step” process. As most delegations here are aware, it is our view that “building blocks” has now largely superceded “step by step” terminology because of the latter’s fixation with linear progression which we regard as too constricting. The most recent manifestation of the building blocks approach is now contained in the “Progressive Approach” paper which outlines at least 25 effective measures, many of which we hope to see in the Chair’s compendium of recommendations for going forward. As you know, this paper secured the support of 18 delegations present at the OEWG. Some of these measures rely on nuclear weapon states’ involvement, and indeed that of nuclear possessor states. But others can be initiated by all of us at a national level. We are hoping you have had a chance to read our paper, as we believe the measures it contains are pragmatic, and to varying degrees, achievable measures. My question is whether your assertion on the poor scorecard of the step by step approach, and presumably, its efficacy in the future, applies equally to the ideas contained in the “progressive approach” paper.

I thank you Mr Chairman