SECOND PREPARATORY COMMITTEE FOR THE 2005 NPT REVIEW CONFERENCE

Statement by H.E. Mr Michael Smith
Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Australia to the
United Nations and to the Conference on Disarmament, Geneva

28 April 2003
Mr Chairman, the Australian delegation congratulates you most warmly on your appointment as Chairman of this Committee. We look forward to working with others to assist you in your important task of guiding the PrepCom’s work.

Our meeting takes place at a time of unprecedented challenge for the Treaty. North Korea has been found to be in non-compliance with its NPT obligations and has announced its withdrawal from the Treaty. Resolution of the significant questions about Iraq’s NPT compliance during Saddam Hussein’s regime is now finally possible, but only after a coalition of over fifty countries joined to help disarm Iraq of weapons of mass destruction.

Mr Chairman

Let me make clear at the outset NPT parties which are cause for non-compliance concerns, although few in number, directly threaten to undermine the rationale for the Treaty. The non-proliferation regime brings vital security benefits, but more than this, effective non-proliferation is essential for a climate conducive to nuclear disarmament.

All NPT parties have a responsibility for addressing non-compliance. We need to make clear that non-proliferation is a basic norm of responsible international behaviour, and that the price of proliferation is unacceptably high.

The NPT's many advantages include security benefits, the political and economic advantages of normal international relationships and access to peaceful nuclear technology. NPT parties must ensure that those tempted to breach their non-proliferation obligations understand that they will cut themselves off from these benefits. In this connection, we consider that the preparatory process could usefully work to develop some common understandings on the issue of non-compliance which could be adopted at the 2005 Review Conference.

Mr Chairman

The drafters of the IAEA Statute foresaw the critical importance of non-proliferation obligations by requiring that the IAEA report instances of safeguards non-compliance to the UN Security Council. We recall also that following the 31 January 1992 meeting of the Security Council, the President of the Council stated, on behalf of Council members, that the proliferation of all weapons of mass destruction constituted a threat to international peace and security.

We now look to the Security Council to demonstrate clearly that non-compliance can, and will, be dealt with effectively. In this regard, the Security Council's inability to agree on how to deal resolutely with the threat posed by Iraq's weapons of mass destruction was a great disappointment to many nations, nations who depend on the Security Council to help maintain international peace and security.

Mr Chairman

Australia shares the broad international community's deep concerns over North Korea's non-compliance with its NPT obligations and its announced withdrawal from the Treaty. North Korea's nuclear intentions jeopardise security not only in the
immediate region but also more widely. North Korea’s failure to abide by its own solemn undertakings in the NPT represents a step back from universalisation of support for the fundamental principles of nuclear non-proliferation which are at the heart of our Treaty. We cannot afford to sit idly by.

We and many others are working hard to find a peaceful, diplomatic solution. We urge North Korea to comply with the NPT and the non-proliferation obligations flowing from the Treaty. This would set it on the path to productive relations with the international community. In contrast, continued pursuit of nuclear weapons in the face of the concerted international opposition will see North Korea increasingly alienated from the economic and other benefits it so desperately needs.

Australia welcomed the 23-25 April talks between the United States, North Korea and China in Beijing. Notwithstanding the early termination, we hope that these talks will prove to be an important first step towards resolving the North Korean nuclear issue. We would like to record our appreciation for China’s positive role in helping bring these talks about.

Mr Chairman

Iran’s ambitious pursuit of proliferation-sensitive nuclear technology such as uranium enrichment, and a comprehensive and advanced nuclear fuel cycle, is a cause for concern especially given Iran’s place in a troubled region which has already experienced proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. This has inevitably raised questions in the international community about Iran’s true intentions in respect of its nuclear program. We urge Iran to extend the maximum possible cooperation to the IAEA. This is essential if Iran wishes to dispel the mounting doubts about the nature of its nuclear program. In particular, Iran should conclude a safeguards strengthening Additional Protocol as a matter of priority.

Mr Chairman

The value the international community attaches to the NPT is seen clearly in its near-universal membership. We take this opportunity to welcome Cuba warmly as the Treaty’s newest party. We again call upon India, Pakistan and Israel to accede to the Treaty as non-nuclear weapon states.

Mr Chairman

Article VI commitments are a central obligation of the Treaty. Useful progress has been made on nuclear disarmament, even though this progress may not have been entirely uniform and the pace has been uneven. Australia expects further action on nuclear disarmament, and remains fully committed to supporting balanced and progressive steps for the elimination of nuclear weapons.

The Treaty of Moscow signed by Presidents Bush and Putin in 2002 was a significant step towards nuclear disarmament. The significance of the Treaty of Moscow lies not just in its quantitative reductions but also in its ushering in of a more cooperative US-Russia arms control relationship. We hope both countries will take advantage of the opportunities provided by this approach to pursue further reductions to strategic and non-strategic nuclear weapons in both active service and reserve holdings. We
look also to the other nuclear weapon states for further progress on nuclear disarmament, noting the important steps taken already by the United Kingdom and France.

The 2000 Review Conference’s 13 nuclear disarmament steps are a strong basis for progress. We recognise that some of the 13 steps are long-term goals, some are more ready for progress that others, and some have been overtaken by events. However, we will need to ensure that the overall intent of the 13 steps is maintained.

Mr Chairman

Non-nuclear weapon states have an important role to play in encouraging an environment favourable to progress on nuclear disarmament. Strong support for the non-proliferation regime is one way. The CTBT is another - in which regard it is gratifying that 168 countries have signed and 98 have ratified the CTBT establishing it as a powerful international norm against nuclear testing.

Australia urges those yet to sign or ratify the CTBT to do so without delay. Until the CTBT enters into force, existing moratoriums on nuclear testing must be maintained, and strong support for the development of the Treaty’s International Monitoring System sustained.

We also look to this PrepCom to reiterate support for early negotiation of a treaty to ban the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons. Pending a start to negotiations, we value the informal work on cut-off issues being done in Geneva and elsewhere. We call upon all relevant states to join the moratoriums on production of fissile material for nuclear weapons being applied by the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom and France.

Mr Chairman

The IAEA must have a strong kit of legal and practical tools for implementing its task as the NPT’s verification agency. The current concerns about compliance with NPT obligations further underline the urgency of achieving wide application of the Additional Protocol on strengthened safeguards.

We should be clear that the strengthened safeguards system is not about states with comprehensive safeguards taking on additional commitments. Rather it is about giving effect to the latest stage in the evolution of the “Agency’s safeguards system” which non-nuclear weapon states party to the NPT have an existing obligation to accept. Our view is that the “Agency’s safeguards system” should come quickly to be regarded as comprising both classical safeguards (INFCIRC/153) and an Additional Protocol (INFCIRC/540).

Mr Chairman

India and Pakistan illustrate the dangers of nuclear proliferation. The tensions between these two countries have been heightened by the additional risk posed by their possession of nuclear weapons. They are now living with the danger of a catastrophic nuclear exchange. We hope that India and Pakistan will come to accept that nuclear weapons have diminished, not added to, their security and will turn away
from these weapons. In the near term we look to both to maintain their moratoriums on nuclear testing, for progress on CTBT signature and application of stringent export controls.

Mr Chairman

The NPT has a good record in facilitating access to peaceful nuclear applications as part of the balance of rights and obligations states assume under the Treaty. Australia has actively participated over the Treaty’s history in multilateral, regional and bilateral nuclear technology transfer and technical cooperation activities intended to foster the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

In view of the clear relationship between the non-proliferation objectives of the Treaty and the peaceful uses objectives of Article IV we would like to see this NPT review process offer strong support for effective nuclear export controls.

Mr Chairman

The current intense international focus on the dangers of weapons of mass destruction proliferation, including potentially to terrorists, has lent further importance to an effective nuclear non-proliferation regime. IAEA safeguards, export controls and physical protection measures are at the heart of preventing the misuse of nuclear material by either state or non-state actors. We strongly support the central role being taken by the IAEA in international efforts to combat the risk of nuclear terrorism. Australia was pleased to be able to make an early contribution to the IAEA’s nuclear security fund, and we encourage others to contribute to this fund. Further, we encourage states which have not done so to sign and ratify the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material and member states to adopt very soon the strengthened Convention provisions agreed recently in Vienna.

Mr Chairman

The obligations NPT parties take on are not given lightly and go to the heart of their fundamental security interests. NPT withdrawal should be regarded as an issue of the deep international importance to be tested against high international standards. NPT withdrawal should be possible in only the most exceptional circumstances.

The NPT remains the world’s best defence against the spread of nuclear weapons and is the only global treaty dedicated to their eventual elimination. All of us share a common interest in maintaining and strengthening the Treaty’s central role in global security arrangements. The Australian delegation looks forward to working closely with others on this task.