Cluster I Statement

for delivery by
H.E. Caroline Millar
Permanent Representative of Australia to the United Nations, Ambassador for Disarmament

Thank you Mr Chairman.

The NPT is vital to global efforts to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons and to realise complete and irreversible nuclear disarmament. Australia is committed to achieving the goal of nuclear disarmament through balanced, progressive and reinforcing steps. As required under the treaty, all states must play their part in reaching this goal. But the international community rightly looks to the nuclear weapon states to take the lead through lasting reductions of their nuclear arsenals.

Australia welcomes the actions taken in this direction. In particular, we acknowledge the deep reductions in warhead weapons – as well as delivery systems – undertaken by the United States and the Russian Federation, including as part of the Moscow Treaty. Australia notes the historically low number of strategic nuclear warheads that are expected to remain deployed by 2012. We encourage the US and Russia to continue efforts aimed at further deep and irreversible cuts to their nuclear arsenals thereafter.

Australia also welcomes the recent announcement by the United Kingdom that it will reduce its holdings of nuclear warheads by 20 per cent. This is a significant cut by any measure and will reduce the number of that country’s nuclear warheads to a low point seemingly unimaginable during the Cold War.

Despite these positive steps, however, Australia looks to states within and outside the treaty that possess nuclear weapons to continue efforts towards the elimination of their nuclear arsenals. Such efforts must be undertaken transparently. We welcome reports to this PrepCom and other meetings, but note that such transparency is applied unequally by nuclear weapon states. We encourage the nuclear weapon states to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in their security policies, thereby lowering the risk that these weapons might ever be used and ensuring they are eventually eliminated altogether. And we urge the nuclear weapon states to reduce further the operational status of their nuclear weapons in ways that promote global security and stability.

Mr Chairman

The burden of responsibility for nuclear disarmament is not the nuclear-weapon states’ alone. All states must contribute to ensuring an environment conducive to nuclear disarmament. Australia is playing its part in strengthening that environment. Australia is a committed party to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. As Coordinator of the Article XIV effort to secure entry into force of the CTBT Australia urges all NPT and other states to accede to this vital
treaty without delay. Australia would like to acknowledge the efforts of Ambassador Jaap Ramaker, Special Representative of States Ratifiers for his efforts to promote entry into force of the CTBT.

Australia also strongly supports negotiation of a legally binding, non-discriminatory treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons that provides for appropriate measures to verify parties' compliance with their obligations – a key measure to ensuring irreversible nuclear disarmament.

We are a party to the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone which we continue to support strongly.

Australia reaffirmed its commitment not to develop, produce, otherwise acquire, stockpile, retain or use nuclear weapons in the Agreement between the Republic of Indonesia and Australia on the Framework for Security Cooperation (the Lombok treaty) signed in November 2006. And Australia has joined others in sending a clear political signal on the need for nuclear disarmament through UNGA resolutions on the elimination of nuclear weapons, the CTBT, disarmament education and the FMCT.

States have an opportunity to make significant progress on some of these issues, notably an FMCT, through the work program proposal of the Conference on Disarmament's six presidents. We urge CD member states to seize this opportunity by agreeing to the proposal when the CD resumes in a fortnight.

Mr Chairman

Australia is also contributing to nuclear disarmament through its strong adherence to and promotion of the vital non-proliferation provisions of the NPT. Australia has extensive domestic legislation implementing our non-proliferation obligations under the NPT. Our uranium exports are subject to strict safeguards agreements that ensure they can not be used for nuclear weapons. And we have undertaken extensive outreach in our region and beyond to promote non-proliferation measures, including strengthened safeguards under the Additional Protocol, export controls, nuclear security and efforts against nuclear terrorism. Such non-proliferation measures are essential, for there cannot be a world free of nuclear weapons without complete and permanent assurances of non-proliferation.

In this regard, the non-proliferation objectives of the NPT have suffered significant setbacks. North Korea's nuclear test was a fundamental challenge to the NPT and all states parties interests in it – and this PrepCom must respond appropriately. Iran's serious violations of its NPT nuclear safeguards obligations and continuing development of its uranium enrichment program in defiance of the IAEA Board of Governors and the UN Security Council is also a concern for states parties. The DPRK and Iran cases are critical challenges to the nuclear non-proliferation regime. Their actions undermine international confidence, security and stability that is fundamental not only to preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons, but also to ensuring further progress on nuclear disarmament.

Mr Chairman

Australia welcomes – but is not satisfied by – the progress being made on nuclear disarmament. We are gravely concerned by recent set-backs on non-proliferation, but heartened by the strong non-proliferation commitment of the overwhelming majority of NPT parties.

Progress on non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament are fundamental to the strength of the NPT, and to ensuring its shared and enduring security value to all states parties.

Thank you, Mr Chairman