Mr. Chair,

2009 has begun as a year of great promise for nuclear disarmament. We have witnessed almost two decades of significant reductions in the numbers of deployed nuclear weapons. However this year there is a new sense of commitment, at the highest levels and from more countries, to a world free of nuclear weapons. As we plan for the 2010 Review Conference, it bodes very well for our work that several Nuclear Weapons States appear poised to start a new virtuous cycle of cuts.

Canada welcomes the joint statement by Presidents Obama and Medvedev of 1 April this year that the two states which together possess 95% of the world’s nuclear arsenal will strive to conclude a new, legally-binding strategic arms reduction treaty to replace START I by year’s end. The joint statement lends new strength to the disarmament pillar of the NPT. Our work would be further catalyzed by similar disarmament announcements by all other states that possess nuclear weapons.
The United States and Russia are not alone in making positive new commitments to nuclear disarmament. The United Kingdom’s leadership demonstrated by its ‘Road to 2010 Plan’ and its verification initiative is rooted in the unchallengeable logic that accelerating nuclear disarmament also advances our nuclear non-proliferation goals. Significant also was the set of disarmament initiatives proposed by French President Sarkozy on behalf of the EU to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon in December 2008. The Secretary General himself laid out his own five-point proposal last autumn. This new leadership in nuclear disarmament is also being supported significantly by non-nuclear weapons states, including Australia and Japan’s International Commission on Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament and Norway’s work with the UK on verification.

However, Canada is deeply concerned by reports that at least one Nuclear Weapons State foresees an enhanced role for so-called tactical nuclear weapons. Let us be clear: whether deployed by land, sea or air, the use of any nuclear weapon, however small, would be a strategic decision of such magnitude as to change the course of the 21st Century. It should also be recalled that the smaller the nuclear weapon, the greater the risk of its proliferation.

Article VI’s obligations do not apply exclusively to the Nuclear Weapons States, of course. Ratification of the CTBT by all Nuclear Weapons States would encourage the remaining Annex 2 states to join as well. US President Obama’s pledge to work for US ratification is long-awaited good news for the 2010 Review Conference. Let us all work to make CTBT entry-into-force a reality in 2010.

Other elements of the ‘13 Practical Steps’ also appear within closer reach this year. All states have committed to negotiations to ban the production of fissile material, and the disarmament pillar of the NPT will be further strengthened once the Conference on Disarmament (CD) starts negotiations on a verifiable FMCT. Dialogue at the CD this year suggests that there is virtually no opposition to negotiating a verifiable ban on the production of fissile material on the basis of the Shannon Mandate. As we have done for years now, Canada continues to calls on all CD members to support a Program of Work that includes the start of such negotiations, and reminds States Parties that agreeing to a Program of Work in the CD would not bind any state to anything more than participation in negotiations.

To conclude, Mr. Chair, Canada is greatly encouraged that the disarmament pillar of the NPT is regaining its strength and should soon be in better shape than it has been in years. But our optimism must be tempered by the fact that nuclear disarmament is not occurring in all countries with nuclear weapons. The most limited use of nuclear weapons by a country or actor anywhere would have devastating consequences for global security and for humanity.
As we work to achieve success at the NPT Review Conference next year, let us be mindful of the need for all states – both inside and outside the NPT – to work together to advance nuclear disarmament, and toward a truly global commitment to a nuclear-weapon-free world.

Thank you Mr. Chair.