Third Preparatory Committee for the 2010 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference

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Specific Issue – Regional Issues

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(Check against delivery)

Mr Chairman

One of the key drivers in Australia’s decision to join the NPT, as for many other parties, was the positive role the NPT could play in promoting regional stability.

Today, the NPT remains as vital to ensuring regional security as it is to safeguarding global security.

With this in mind, I will focus on two regions: the Asia-Pacific and the Middle East.

Mr Chairman

A key foreign policy objective for Australia has been to prevent proliferation of nuclear weapons in the Asia Pacific region. This is a region that includes one recognised nuclear weapon state and three states that have tested nuclear weapons either outside of, or in violation of, this treaty.

Despite this, the Asia Pacific is also a region in which a majority of states have committed themselves not to manufacture, acquire, test, or possess nuclear weapons through the creation of two nuclear weapon-free zones: the Southeast Asian Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone, the Treaty of Bangkok, and the South Pacific Nuclear Weapon Free
Zone, the Treaty of Rarotonga. Combined, these treaties create a prohibition against the stationing of nuclear weapons over a broad stretch of territory.

Nuclear weapon free zones can clearly play an important role in preventing proliferation consistent with NPT obligations. Through the addition of protocols for nuclear weapon states, nuclear weapon-free zones also provide a means by which non-nuclear weapon states can obtain binding assurances against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons. Australia urges relevant nuclear-weapon states to sign and ratify the protocols to the Treaties of Bangkok and Rarotonga.

Australia was a key driver behind the South Pacific Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone and remains a strong supporter of nuclear weapon-free zones. In this context we encourage practical cooperation among the existing nuclear weapons free zones in the Southern Hemisphere. Although not in our region, we also welcome the continued efforts among African states to bring into force the Treaty of Pelindaba.

And we encourage members of all zones to work with each other and the nuclear weapon states to bring these arrangements into full effect.

The DPRK’s nuclear weapons program is a serious challenge to the nuclear non-proliferation regime and to the peace, stability and security of the Asia Pacific region and beyond.

North Korea’s 5 April long-range missile test was a provocative act that, however described by North Korea, was in breach of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1718. It was justifiably condemned by responsible members of the international community, including Australia. We welcomed the UNSC’s unanimous adoption on 13 April of a Presidential Statement stating clearly that North Korea’s launch was a contravention of Resolution 1718.

Australia has been a vocal supporter of the progress made under the Six Party Talks towards the removal of nuclear weapons from the Korean Peninsula. We are saddened that North Korea would choose to undo this good work by leaving the Six-Party Talks and re-starting its Yongbyon nuclear facilities. Australia is particularly disappointed with North Korea’s decision to cease cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Australia urges North Korea to reconsider these decisions. Consistent with our commitment to nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, we will continue to support the Six-Party Talks process. We continue to urge North Korea to fulfil the commitments it has made in the Talks and seize what is its best chance to rejoin the international community.

Australia and regional countries, in fora such as the ASEAN Regional Forum and East Asian Summit, have reaffirmed the critical importance of the de-nuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula, the need for North Korea to denuclearise in a verifiable manner, refrain from actions that threaten regional and international security and re-commit to the NPT.
Mr Chairman

Australia supports fully the Middle East peace process and a solution two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict based on Israel’s right to live in peace with secure borders and the legitimate aspirations of Palestinian people for a state of their own.

The difficult security issues in the Middle East would only be made worse by regional countries developing nuclear weapons or other weapons of mass destruction.

Possession of such weapons, or programs for their acquisition, fuels proliferation, damages regional security and risks unforeseen consequences.

Australia supports fully the establishment of an effectively verifiable Middle East zone free of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery and has joined consensus on the UN General Assembly resolution on this issue. We also continue to support the universal application of IAEA safeguards, including in the Middle East.

Australia contributes to this goal through its efforts to achieve universal membership of the NPT and other WMD and missile non-proliferation treaties and codes.

Membership of and adherence to these measures by the countries of the Middle East, even if undertaken progressively, would be a step towards a WMD-free Middle East.

Mr Chairman

Compliance by all state parties in the region with their non-proliferation obligations under the treaty is important in realising the objective of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons, as well as other weapons of mass destruction.

Mr Chairman

States that are still to join the NPT have a responsibility to support the nuclear non-proliferation norm, particularly by ensuring strict domestic controls on their nuclear materials, equipment, technology and knowledge.

How non-NPT states can engage in non-proliferation disciplines will be a key focus of the International Commission on Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament, established by Australia and Japan.

Universality remains essential to full realisation of the treaty’s goals and should remain the highest priority.

Australia therefore again calls upon all those States that have not yet joined the NPT – India, Israel and Pakistan – to accede to it as non-nuclear-weapon states as soon as possible.
Mr Chairman

Australia acknowledges the difficulty of achieving disarmament and non-proliferation goals without concurrent efforts to address the underlying political tensions that drive regional conflicts. Australia urges all member states to work for secure regional political environments in which countries do not mistakenly believe they need to possess nuclear weapons to guarantee their security.