Australia

Cluster 1 statement

Mr Chairman

Australia is committed to the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons, pursued in an effective, determined, realistic, and pragmatic way.

For Australia, reaching global zero is not only consistent with clear international obligations under Article VI of the NPT, but is also a key requirement for making the world a safer place.

Disturbing recent developments on the Korean Peninsula provide a potent reality check for all of us. We call on the DPRK to abandon its nuclear weapon and ballistic missile development programs. These programs pose a grave threat to global peace and security, and are in defiance of UN Security Council resolutions and the DPRK’s other international obligations.

More broadly, the challenging security environment has brought into stark focus the challenges facing the NPT.

Mr Chairman

Australia’s position on the negotiations currently underway for a treaty banning nuclear weapons has been consistent and clear. We do not support such an approach for reasons of principle and practicality.
It is axiomatic that States will only get rid of their nuclear arsenals when they feel it is safe to do so. Laying the ground work to eliminate such weapons requires much greater trust, more effective verification processes and assurance that capabilities for developing new weapons are not being used for that purpose.

Logical and indispensable next steps are the entry-into-force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT). In the meantime, we must continue every effort to strengthen the normative value of the Treaty and encourage completion of the monitoring system.

All efforts to promote negotiations on a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT) should also be nurtured. In this respect, Australia is pleased to be represented on the High Level Experts Panel on a FMCT, following up our active representation in the GGE. We will be pleased to support all efforts under the capable leadership of the Canadian Chair, Heidi Hulan, to sustain momentum on this critical track of disarmament. We also encourage the designation by nuclear-weapons States of fissile material no longer required for military purposes and the development of legally binding verification arrangements, within the context of the IAEA, to ensure the irreversible removal of such fissile material.

Australia also welcomes and strongly supports the UNGA71 resolution establishing a Group of Government Experts on Verification and encourages UN member States to submit views on measures to develop and strengthen nuclear disarmament verification. We look forward to working with Norway to promote the initiative in 2018 and 2019. We also are actively involved in, and commend the work of, the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification.
Australia has also been at the forefront of the constructive, cross regional approach embodied in the Nuclear Non Proliferation Disarmament Initiative (NPDI). Despite wide variations of views within the NPDI, for example on how best to progress nuclear disarmament, the group has registered a common voice for practical action across the three pillars. With numerous working papers and the joint statement issued on 2 May, the NPDI has been a catalyst for progressing the NPT 2010 Action Plan, as well as promoting increased transparency by improving arrangements for reporting by NPT nuclear weapon states on details of their nuclear arsenals.

Mr Chairman

The summary Progressive Approach paper that Australia submitted to the PrepCom on behalf of twenty-seven countries outlines the key tenets of our approach which focuses on concrete, realistic steps to progress disarmament. There is much that we can do now to reduce risk, build confidence, and move the agenda forward in practical ways.

We urge those possessing nuclear weapons to take the lead in demonstrating concrete results from such processes. In this regard, we encourage negotiations on a post-New Start Arms Reduction Treaty (START) between the US and the Russian Federation.

One proposal nuclear armed states could do now is enhance transparency with regard to their nuclear arsenals. This would contribute immediately and significantly to building confidence and laying the groundwork for a collective effort to reach global zero.

Mr Chairman
In conclusion, now more than ever is a critical time for us to protect and strengthen the NPT regime. We must seize the opportunity of this 2017-2020 NPT review cycle, and in particular, this NPT PrepCom, to lay a solid foundation for a successful 2020 Review Conference.