Statement by Canada

Cluster 1 - Disarmament

Mr. Chairman

Further progress on nuclear disarmament is essential to assure the continued effectiveness of the NPT. Unfortunately, our near-consensus on this goal is not matched by a common view among states on either the pace at which to achieve it, or the best path to follow. The resulting differences have generated frustration and impeded efforts to build unity on the way ahead for nuclear disarmament.

Indeed, Canada shares the frustration expressed by many states in recent years regarding the pace of nuclear disarmament. The status quo is unacceptable to us. At the same time, nuclear weapons remain fundamental to the security of a significant number of states, as the current international security environment remains unfavourable to rapid disarmament progress. One need only look at the accelerating pace of North Korea's nuclear weapon and ballistic missile development to grasp the extent and severity of threats currently faced by the international community. A greater collective effort will be required to defuse underlying international tensions and create the climate of improved confidence and trust between states necessary to achieve a world without nuclear weapons. As we work towards this longer-term goal, there are pragmatic and incremental steps that Canada believes we can take to move forward now.

That is why Canada, Germany and the Netherlands successfully proposed the creation of a High-Level Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT) Expert Preparatory Group last fall at the UN General Assembly. This Group, which brings together both nuclear weapons possessing states and non-possessor states, will develop recommendations on substantial elements of a future non-discriminatory, multilateral and effectively verifiable FMCT. We believe this exercise will concretely contribute to disarmament by outlining how a treaty can best restrict fissile material for nuclear weapons. We also expect that the findings of this group will be substantial enough. We hope that this will compel the Conference on Disarmament to finally find a path forward for actual FMCT negotiations.

Another resolution adopted in the General Assembly last year which holds promise for advancing overall nuclear disarmament is the planned Group of Governmental Experts on Nuclear Disarmament Verification. This initiative complements the International Partnership on Nuclear Disarmament Verification which is currently developing the required knowledge, capacity and technical solutions that could verify compliance with future multilateral nuclear disarmament agreements.

An additional tangible measure to advance disarmament would be entry-into-force of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). While we support the de facto norm against explosive nuclear testing established by the CTBT, we recognize that it is no substitute for the Treaty’s entry-into-force. Moreover, we deplore the repeated nuclear tests of the DPRK, which threaten to undermine it. We reiterate our call to all states which have yet to ratify the Treaty, in particular the remaining Annex II states, to do so without further delay. We have argued that
nuclear disarmament is difficult to advance when there is a dearth of trust and confidence among states. By remaining outside the CTBT, eight states are feeding uncertainty about their intentions which is contrary to all our interests.

The provision of assurances to non-nuclear weapon states against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons is another area for further progress. Canada believes that broader application of assurances would enhance global security. These guarantees should be unconditional and offered to non-nuclear weapon states which fully respect their NPT obligations.

Individually, each step we have described has either imparted some momentum to the disarmament process, or could do so. Taken together, they would enhance the confidence and trust between states which is so noticeably lacking. These initiatives also have the advantage of being supported by the majority of states. Naturally, these steps will not immediately rid the world of nuclear weapons. It will take time to build trust, and require both the support of the majority of states and the committed engagement of nuclear weapon states.

We need to restore our collective purpose in eliminating nuclear weapons. To achieve this, non-nuclear weapon states will need to maintain a certain degree of patience, while working to advance the negotiation of an FMCT, bringing the CTBT into force and developing nuclear disarmament verification capabilities. Meanwhile, nuclear weapon states must recognize that confirming their status in 1995 did not diminish their obligation to disarm. Their actions need to complement the spirit of the NPT. Inaction, or contrary action, is not what the NPT demands, nor what the majority of its State Parties expect.

Thank you.