SEVENTH REVIEW CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE TREATY ON THE NON-PROLIFERATION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

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Main Committee I Statement

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(Check against delivery)

It is especially welcome that Indonesia, a near neighbour which shares our strong commitment to the NPT, has provided the Chair for this important committee.

Australia remains fully committed to the goal of a nuclear-weapon-free world. As one of the vast majority of NPT parties to have foresworn nuclear weapons, we expect the nuclear-weapon states to pursue NPT nuclear disarmament commitments vigorously and with determination. Australia has joined with Japan in putting forward some ideas for further progress on nuclear disarmament. These have been circulated as document NPT:CONF/2005/WP.34

At the same time, we believe it is important to recognise the substantial progress made with regard to nuclear disarmament. A major development since the 2000 Review Conference is the conclusion of the Moscow Treaty between the United States and the Russian Federation. The reductions in deployed US and Russian strategic nuclear warheads contemplated under this agreement – to nearly two-thirds below 2002 levels by 2012 – are significant, and to claim otherwise would be to deny reality.

Of course, the Moscow Treaty is a step on the road to nuclear disarmament, not the final destination. We look to the United States and Russia to continue reductions to strategic and non-strategic nuclear weapons in both deployed and reserve holdings.
Australia also acknowledges the nuclear disarmament steps taken by the United Kingdom and France. The fact that US and Russian nuclear arsenals are many times larger does not excuse the nuclear-weapon states with smaller arsenals from NPT nuclear disarmament commitments.

The significance of the Moscow Treaty lies not just in its quantitative reductions but in ushering in a more cooperative US-Russia arms control relationship.

We welcome steps taken to reduce the operational readiness of nuclear-weapon systems, including de-targeting and reduction in the alert status of some nuclear-weapon systems. We look to the nuclear-weapon states to pursue further reductions in the operational status of nuclear-weapon systems in ways that promote international stability and security.

Mr Chairman

It is important that the nuclear-weapon states are as transparent as possible about their nuclear-weapons policies and nuclear disarmament actions. This will contribute to a productive, well-informed debate.

While the nuclear-weapon states continue to possess nuclear weapons, they have a responsibility to ensure their nuclear-weapons policies do not detract from the global non-proliferation norm. Were this to occur, the treaty's basic foundation could be eroded. In particular, the nuclear-weapon states must ensure a reduced role for nuclear weapons in their national security policies.

We recall that a key outcome from the 2000 Review Conference was that the principle of irreversibility should apply to nuclear disarmament. This is an issue all nuclear-weapon states should address in providing information on implementation of Article VI commitments.

As with reductions in nuclear weapons, we recognize that progress has been made on irreversibility, including with regard to the substantial amounts of excess fissile material to be used in peaceful nuclear programs or disposed of so that it is no longer usable in nuclear weapons. We also welcome the work being done by the United Kingdom on means of verifying the reduction and elimination of nuclear weapons. Effective verification will be central to irreversible nuclear disarmament.

Mr Chairman

All States Parties, including the non-nuclear-weapons states, must demonstrate their commitment to practical steps to facilitate nuclear disarmament.

Australia, like many other States Party, places particular importance on entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT). We are convinced that entry into force of the CTBT would serve the interests of all NPT parties – non-nuclear and nuclear-weapon states alike.

Yet should we lose sight of the fact that the CTBT’s International Monitoring System delivers real security and other benefits, including a possible role in a global tsunami warning system. We look to the Review Conference to urge those countries yet to sign or
ratify the CTBT to do so as quickly as possible. Until the CTBT enters into force, existing moratoriums on nuclear testing must be maintained, and strong support for the development of the International Monitoring System sustained.

Australia is honoured to have been appointed coordinator of the next Article XIV conference on ways to accelerate CTBT entry into force. With 175 signatories and 120 ratifications, the CTBT has established a powerful international norm against further nuclear testing. The Article XIV conference will further underscore the strong and unwavering international support for the CTBT.

Capping the amount of fissile material available for nuclear-weapons use is an essential step towards irreversible nuclear disarmament. Yet ten years after the 1995 Principles and Objectives identifies the FMCT as a key Article VI step, a start to negotiations remains denied by the deadlock in the Conference on Disarmament. This profound failure to fulfill its mandate has brought the CD to a point where its utility as an effective disarmament forum is in doubt. The Review Conference must serve as a catalyst for an immediate start to FMCT negotiations and their early conclusion. Australia's position is that, to be credible and effective, the FMCT should include appropriate measures to verify that parties are complying with their obligations.

We welcome the moratorium by most nuclear-weapon states on production of fissile material for nuclear weapons. We hope China will join the other nuclear-weapon states in announcing it will apply a moratorium on production of fissile material for nuclear weapons. We also urge India, Pakistan and Israel to apply a moratorium on production of fissile material for nuclear weapons purposes.

Nuclear-weapon-free zones make a significant contribution to nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament. Australia also places great importance on nuclear-weapon-free zones as a vehicle for providing binding negative security assurances to NPT non-nuclear-weapon states. Over the past decade, the signature by nuclear-weapon states of the protocols to nuclear-weapon-free zone treaties has increased the number of non-nuclear-weapon states benefiting from legally-binding negative security assurances. Where nuclear-weapon states are yet to sign or ratify such protocols, we encourage continuation of discussions aimed at resolving remaining issues to enable this to happen.

Mr Chairman

Universality remains essential to full realisation of the NPT's objectives. While we accept that this is a long-term goal, it should by no means be seen as unattainable. History shows that nuclear proliferation is reversible. South Africa eliminated its nuclear weapons and joined the NPT as a non-nuclear-weapon state. Following the break-up of the Soviet Union, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine all turned away from possession of nuclear weapons and sought their removal to Russia, joining the NPT as non-nuclear-weapon states.

Pending their joining the treaty as non-nuclear-weapon states, the non-NPT states – India, Pakistan and Israel – should refrain from actions contrary to the universal norms embodied in the Treaty. In particular, they must support the global nuclear non-proliferation norm by ensuring strict domestic controls on their nuclear materials, equipment, technology and knowledge.
We also look to the non-NPT states to support practical progress on nuclear disarmament. In this regard, it is of concern that India and Pakistan have yet to sign the CTBT and that Israel, while it has signed the CTBT, has not yet ratified. For each of these countries the CTBT is an opportunity to put in place a significant confidence-building measure in a region of tension.

Mr Chairman

We need at all times to keep in clear sight the NPT’s central contribution to global peace and security, even while nuclear disarmament remains a work in progress, and to acknowledge that nuclear disarmament cannot be considered in isolation from other aspects of the treaty, or indeed from the wider international security environment.

Nuclear-weapon states and non-nuclear-weapon states will need to make full use of the opportunities of this conference to engage constructively on identifying practical, realistic nuclear disarmament measures. But, as the Australian Foreign Minister said earlier this week, and as Secretary-General Annan has emphasised, movement on nuclear disarmament should not be a precondition for further improvements to the non-proliferation regime.