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

20 May 2005

Main Committee II Statement

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(Check against delivery)

Thank you Mr Chairman

I would first like to take this opportunity to congratulate you on your appointment as Chair of this Committee and thank you for the careful and balanced approach you have taken.

Mr Chairman

As with all aspects of the conference, Australia looks to this committee to conduct a fair and balanced review of the issues that acknowledges the benefits of and challenges to the NPT, and to achieve consensus outcomes for future progress.

The benefits of the NPT in the area of safeguards are beyond any doubt. NPT safeguards applied by the IAEA provide the practical means for states to demonstrate their commitment to use nuclear energy exclusively for peaceful purposes. Safeguards are also the means by which states can have confidence in the peaceful nature of nuclear activities by other states. The assurance so provided is a fundamental element of collective security.
The safeguards system delivers much more than its direct security benefits. The assurance that states’ nuclear activities are peaceful is an essential foundation for trade and cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. And effective non-proliferation assurances, as provided by the safeguards system, are a crucial factor in building the environment of confidence necessary for progress on nuclear disarmament.

While the NPT is often described as a “bargain” between the goals of disarmament, non-proliferation and the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, it is not the type of bargain in which the interests of some parties are pitted against the countervailing interests of other parties. For the reasons I have described, all NPT parties have a clear and common interest in strong support for the IAEA safeguards system, and in ensuring its continued effectiveness and responsiveness to current challenges.

Mr Chairman

The period since our last Review Conference has confronted the NPT non-proliferation regime with unprecedented challenges.

Since Iran revealed its previously undeclared nuclear program in February 2003, the IAEA has reported a number of serious failures by that country to comply with its safeguards obligations, including deliberate and long-standing efforts to conceal material, facilities and sensitive nuclear fuel cycle activities that it was obliged to declare. While Iran has made some steps towards greater transparency and cooperation with the IAEA, key questions remain about the nature and intentions of its nuclear program. The Conference should make clear its expectation that Iran cooperate fully with the IAEA to resolve these issues. The Conference should also reiterate the IAEA Board of Governors’ call for Iran to maintain its suspension on enrichment and reprocessing activities as a confidence-building measure.

North Korea’s claims to have withdrawn from the NPT and to have developed nuclear weapons are an affront to the NPT goals of preventing the spread of nuclear weapons and advancing nuclear disarmament – goals that have near-universal support. North Korea’s actions represent a serious threat to security in north-east Asia and to the integrity of the NPT regime. This conference, and the international community at large, must remain united in urging North Korea to set aside its announced NPT withdrawal and to return to compliance with the NPT, including through the complete abandonment of nuclear-weapons programs and the acceptance of IAEA safeguards. North Korea should understand that it cannot continue to refuse to engage in constructive negotiations leading to the dismantlement of its nuclear program, and that the status quo is unacceptable.

Australia’s report on steps taken to promote the achievement of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction has been circulated (NPT/CONF.2005/12).

Mr Chairman, this Conference must recognise that the avowed interest of terrorist organisations in acquiring weapons of mass destruction presents a chilling new dimension to the threat of nuclear proliferation. While the risk of nuclear terrorist attacks needs to be kept in perspective, their potential consequences justify comprehensive counter-measures by the international community. As Director General ElBaradei noted in September 2004, we need to start thinking in terms of a new global nuclear safety and
security regime encompassing broad observance of safety and security conventions, universal application of the IAEA’s strengthened safeguards system, increased collaboration with relevant international bodies, and vigilance on the part of regulators, operators and users of nuclear and radioactive material.

Australia’s hosting of a ministerial-level Asia-Pacific Nuclear Safeguards and Security Conference in November 2004, and our contributions to the IAEA’s Nuclear Security Fund and the G8 Global Partnership against the Spread of WMD, illustrate the importance we attach to ensuring that the threat of nuclear terrorism never becomes a reality. The outcomes statement from the Asia-Pacific conference has been made available to delegates (NPT/CONF.2005/2). Australia also welcomes the recent conclusion of the Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism.

Mr Chairman

The excellent record of compliance of most parties with their NPT safeguards obligations demonstrates wide international recognition of the benefits of a strong non-proliferation regime. But the revelations of previously undeclared nuclear programs in Libya and Iran, following the disclosure of Iraq’s nuclear activities in the mid-1990s, can leave us in no further doubt that comprehensive IAEA safeguards are insufficient to prevent proliferant states from covertly acquiring sensitive nuclear materials and technology.

This shortcoming has prompted the development of the strengthened safeguards system. The key element of this system is the Additional Protocol, which serves all states’ interests by enhancing the IAEA’s ability to provide assurances as to the peaceful nature of nuclear activities – in turn supporting cooperation on peaceful uses, further progress on nuclear disarmament, and global security in general.

Many states represented here will recently have been approached bilaterally by Australia to urge early implementation of an Additional Protocol. We take this opportunity again to urge states yet to sign or ratify an Additional Protocol to take prompt action in this regard. As the first state to conclude an Additional Protocol, in 1997, Australia has gained much experience in the implementation of the strengthened safeguards system, and will continue to offer technical assistance to states that require it – particularly those located in our own Asia-Pacific region.

Progress towards universalisation of strengthened safeguards has been steady, with 67 Additional Protocols in force, and another 35 signed or approved by the IAEA Board. Particularly welcome is the fact that three-quarters of NPT non-nuclear-weapon states with significant nuclear activities have signed or ratified an Additional Protocol. States with significant nuclear activities still outside the strengthened safeguards system are clearly out of step with the overwhelming majority. Furthermore, since the Additional Protocol is concerned with improving the Agency’s capacity to detect undeclared nuclear material and activities, it is important that it be implemented by all states – including those which have declared that they have no significant nuclear activities.

It is important to remember that the Agency’s safeguards system is not static, and that this system has undergone considerable evolution since the NPT entered into force more than three decades ago. The strengthened safeguards system is the latest manifestation of this evolution. A comprehensive safeguards agreement together with an Additional
Protocol now represents the verification standard required under Article III.1 of the NPT. The Conference should declare this standard unequivocally.

It is essential to the effective implementation of strengthened safeguards that the IAEA has the ability to confirm the correctness and completeness of states’ declarations of their nuclear material and activities. This is why the Additional Protocol is so important. For the same reason, Small Quantities Protocols – under which safeguards are suspended in states which declare that they have only limited nuclear material and activities – can no longer be considered appropriate.

The Conference should also register deep concern that a large number of NPT parties are yet to fulfil the basic obligation of concluding a comprehensive safeguards agreement, and urge these states to do so without further delay.

Mr Chairman, Australia and a number of other non-nuclear-weapon states have again prepared a series of draft elements on Main Committee II issues. The G10 group hopes that these papers will assist the work of the Committee, and we look forward to working with other delegations in a constructive and positive spirit. Main Committee II has an excellent record in achieving consensus and we believe that this result is again within reach.

Thank you Mr Chairman.