Australian Statement at the Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons
8-9 December 2014

Thank you for the opportunity to speak, and thank you to the Government of Austria for hosting us in this magnificent venue. We are pleased to see a diverse range of States and civil society represented at this meeting. We welcome the participation by the United States and the United Kingdom and hope that all the other nuclear armed states will add their voices to such discussions.

All of us here understand that the humanitarian consequences of nuclear war would be catastrophic. The terrible consequences of nuclear war include long-term indirect effects on human health, environment, climate and the global economy. This concern underpins all our efforts to promote effective and practical nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.

Against that backdrop, Australia is pursuing a path that offers the most practical and realistic chance for disarmament. To be effective, disarmament must be based on high-level political will, supported by practical, sustained efforts, which we are pursuing, including through implementation of the 2010 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Action Plan and our membership of the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative (NPDI).

Some may challenge the concept of deterrence, but it is still part of the security and defence doctrines of many States, including Australia. Deterrence remains because nuclear weapons pose an existential threat to
States. One country refusing to give up its nuclear weapons imposes a very powerful constraint against others giving up their nuclear weapons, and the deterrence they provide.

Therefore, effective disarmament must engage all the nuclear armed states substantively and constructively. It must recognise and address security as well as humanitarian concerns. Prospects for disarmament are enhanced by engaging, not alienating, those states that will need to take the action to disarm.

The existing global arms control infrastructure has already established a strong global norm against nuclear weapons use in war. The NPT contains hard-won legally-binding commitments, negotiated over 11 years, for all states parties to achieve general and complete disarmament. While some are impatient with the pace of disarmament, the NPT has been successful in preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons. We are very wary of any process which could undermine the existing arms control framework and weaken legally-binding disarmament and non-proliferation commitments.

We must continue to encourage the Nuclear Weapon States to meet their existing NPT commitments. And we continue to call upon all nuclear-armed States to abide by the principles of the NPT. This is why we and fellow members of the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative have emphasised the importance of transparency, regular reporting, de-alerting of nuclear weapons, reducing or eliminating battlefield-deployable nuclear weapons and further reductions in arsenals. These points and many other practical, achievable steps consistent with the 2010 Action Plan are set out in a series of NPDI working papers submitted
during the current NPT RevCon cycle. Key proposals were also outlined in the joint NPDI ministerial statement made at Hiroshima in April this year. The NPDI will be submitting a further working paper to the NPT Review Conference in 2015 which synthesizes practical, realistic ideas for progress on the three pillars of the NPT.

Mr Chairman,

An effective pathway to disarmament must be inclusive. It must embolden States to reduce further their arsenals and to implement their commitments enshrined in the 2010 Action Plan. There is work to be done here, and this is where the focus of our efforts should be.

Thank you.