



AUSTRALIA



AUSTRALIAN MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

E-mail australia@un.int

150 East 42nd Street, New York NY 10017-5612 Ph 212 - 351 6600 Fax 212 - 351 6610 www.AustraliaUN.org

UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY 58th SESSION

Thursday, 9 October 2003

First Committee - General Debate Statement delivered by H.E. Mr Peter Tesch Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative of Australia to the United Nations

(Check against delivery)

Mr Chairman,

May I express the Australian delegation's congratulations on your appointment as Chair of the Committee.

As we begin our work, we should recall that resolutions are not an end in themselves. The First Committee's authority and credibility will inevitably erode if resolutions do not translate into practical outcomes.

We have a responsibility to make the work of the First Committee relevant to current security challenges. It follows that we should concentrate our efforts on the most pressing and widely-held concerns. This requires a revitalisation and streamlining of its agenda and processes. We welcome the proposal to convene a session on First Committee reform.

Mr Chairman,

The spread of WMD and their delivery systems represents the most serious threat to international security.

This is of course not a new threat, with the First Committee having devoted much effort to addressing the proliferation of WMD. But the demand among proliferators for WMD-related technologies is growing. We increasingly face the prospect of WMD being acquired by states and non-state actors with little regard for the norms of responsible international behaviour.

The development of indigenous WMD-related capabilities in countries of concern is increasing, as is the threat that these countries could make WMD available to others, including terrorists. The prospect of WMD falling into terrorist hands is unthinkable, yet a challenge we must address collectively and resolutely.

It cannot be denied that we are meeting at a time of strong challenges to the existing non-proliferation and disarmament regime based on treaties such as the NPT, CWC, BWC and the CTBT.

Since we met last, North Korea has been found by the IAEA to be in non-compliance with its NPT safeguards obligations and announced its withdrawal from the NPT. Serious questions have also emerged about the nature of Iran's nuclear program. There are persistent concerns regarding the compliance of some parties to the other major non-proliferation treaties.

For this reason, we must redouble our efforts to strengthen international disarmament and non-proliferation norms and arrangements. We must be resolute in dealing with cases of non-compliance. We must send an unambiguous message that the proliferation of WMD cannot be tolerated.

Members of the non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament treaties share a responsibility to respect and strengthen verification mechanisms in these treaties. In the nuclear field, Australia considers application of the International Atomic Energy Agency's strengthened safeguards system – the Additional Protocol – should quickly become an essential pre-requisite for nuclear supply. It is also our view that wide application of the strengthened safeguards system would encourage further progress on nuclear disarmament.

The threat posed by the proliferation of biological weapons is real and increasing. Australia is committed to renewed efforts to strengthen implementation of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC), and we urge all States to participate actively in all BWC meetings leading up to the next review conference in 2006.

Mr Chairman,

While the major WMD norm-setting work has been established in the key treaties, important follow-up work remains. It defies credibility that the widely-held aspiration for a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty continues to be frustrated by the Conference on Disarmament's failure to agree on a work program.

Australia is keen to see the 'Hague' Code of Conduct firmly established as a universal and viable confidence-building measure to help prevent ballistic missile proliferation. Ballistic missiles are the weapon of choice for the delivery of weapons of mass destruction – their proliferation directly affects the security interests of all states. Australia is pleased that 109 states have now subscribed to the Code, although we remain disappointed that so few states in the South East Asian region have yet to do so.

Given the increasing threat posed by WMD proliferation, it is incumbent on us to strengthen these arrangements through a range of complementary measures. Foremost is controlling the transfer or illicit trafficking of WMD-relevant materials and technology. All states must be vigilant in ensuring they do not supply or assist in delivering items that could advance proliferators' WMD or missile programs.

Making better use of existing tools will help. But the reality is that the existing WMD regime is not, by itself, enough to stop determined proliferators. For this reason, Australia, while continuing to support and engage actively in existing WMD instruments, has joined with others in the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI).

The PSI is developing practical ways to further impede illicit trafficking in WMD, their delivery systems and related materials to and from states and non-state actors of proliferation concern. The interdiction principles agreed between PSI members complement existing non-proliferation regimes and are entirely consistent with international laws. Australia strongly encourages the many states committed to preventing the spread of WMD to lend their support to this important initiative.

Mr Chairperson,

Australia is committed to practical disarmament efforts, which have delivered tangible, grass-roots benefits to the international community.

In the area of Small Arms and Light Weapons, Australia has been active in promoting implementation of the UN Program of Action. A continuing priority for us will be to work with regional partners to assist Pacific Island countries strengthen small arms controls and enforcement capacity – an important element of international efforts to combat the illicit trade. Australia welcomes the report of the Secretary-General on the feasibility of developing an international instrument to enable States to identify and trace illicit small arms and light weapons.

Australia is pleased with the considerable progress achieved to date in negotiations on a Protocol on Explosive Remnants of War. Australia's support for a legally-binding instrument stems from a recognition of the serious humanitarian impact of unexploded ordnance on civilian populations. Australia urges all states to continue efforts to reach consensus on an ERW protocol at the final negotiating session in November.

We congratulate Thailand on its successful hosting of the 5th Meeting of States Parties to the Ottawa Convention on anti-personnel landmines. The Convention continues to grow in strength. In our region we commend Timor Leste for recently acceding to the Convention. However, many states remain outside, including some leading members of the UN Security Council, most of the Middle East and much of Asia. This is unacceptable. Australia calls on those states which have yet to accede, to do so as soon as possible and to make clear their commitment not to use anti-personnel mines in the interim.

Mr Chairperson,

In this forum, we must work to foster international support for practical measures that seek to address existing and emerging threats to international security. We must steer the work of this forum away from unproductive debate that has stymied progress. The Australian delegation looks forward to working constructively with all delegations to help ensure a successful session.