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UNGA 59 – FIRST COMMITTEE

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General Debate Statement

**Statement by HE Mr John Dauth
Ambassador and Permanent Representative
of Australia to the United Nations**

(Check against delivery)

Mr Chairman

The Australian delegation congratulates you on your appointment as Chair of the Committee. We look forward to working closely with you over the coming weeks.

There is wide recognition that the UN needs to become more responsive to the contemporary environment. We look to the Secretary-General's High-Level Panel for ambitious, practical proposals which enhance the capacity of the UN to deal with new security challenges. A priority for Australia is to strengthen the First Committee revitalisation process begun last year. If the Committee is to stay relevant and enjoy the support of member states, we cannot be seen as operating in a vacuum, isolated from current threats and priorities.

Mr Chairman

Australia is committed to working to ensure the First Committee delivers tangible security benefits. Australia— together with Turkey and Argentina – will this year introduce a resolution in the First Committee on the "Prevention of the Illicit Transfer and Unauthorised Access to and Use of Man-Portable Air Defence Systems (MANPADS)." Unauthorised MANPADS use represents a growing security threat, particularly given their potential use by terrorists against civil aviation. We commend the resolution to delegations and hope for its consensus adoption.

The treaty-based regime for preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons and working towards their elimination remains essential for global, regional and national security. But there should be no doubt that the regime is under challenge. Exposure of the Khan proliferation network laid bare a widespread and sophisticated nuclear blackmarket. The six-party talks are welcome, but as yet there has been little progress on halting North Korea's nuclear weapons programs. Serious concerns remain about the direction of Iran's nuclear program, and we hope Iran will allay these by complying with the September IAEA Board of Governors resolution.

In the face of these challenges, there should be no question of the urgency of universal application of the IAEA's strengthened safeguards system – the Additional Protocol. We and many others are of the firm view that the IAEA Additional Protocol, together with a comprehensive safeguards agreement, is the current safeguards standard required of non-nuclear weapon states parties to the NPT. An Additional Protocol in force should be a condition of nuclear supply by no later than the end of 2005.

Mr Chairman

Next year's NPT Review Conference will have the task of setting the future nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament agenda. Recent events have highlighted the risk of states misusing the NPT's peaceful nuclear energy provisions to acquire the technical basis for a nuclear weapons program. We strongly support the developing international dialogue on limiting the spread of sensitive nuclear technology. We should be clear this is not a question of reinterpreting the NPT but of ensuring that actions by NPT parties are true to the Treaty's intent and to the global non-proliferation norm.

Like others, we consider that progress on nuclear disarmament is vital to the continued political strength and vitality of the NPT. But we do not share the view that improvements to the non-proliferation regime should be linked inextricably to movement on nuclear disarmament. Such an approach puts at risk the essential security benefit which non-nuclear weapon state parties to the NPT derive from knowing that other non-nuclear weapon states are not engaged in nuclear weapons programs.

Mr Chairman

It is disappointing that another First Committee has come without progress on the widely-held aspiration for negotiation of a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty. Australia believes firmly that, to be credible and effective, the FMCT should include appropriate verification measures. We stand ready to work with all member states on ways to ensure effective FMCT verification. Pending an FMCT, we urge all relevant States to apply a moratorium on production of fissile material for nuclear weapons.

Australia is committed to efforts to strengthen implementation of the Biological Weapons Convention. With Indonesia we plan in February 2005 to co-host a regional workshop on national implementation of the BWC.

The link between WMD and ballistic missiles is widely acknowledged. Ballistic missile proliferation destabilises regional and global security and is inimical to progress towards nuclear disarmament. 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.

Exposure of the Khan proliferation network illustrated starkly the critical importance of effective national controls over production and export of sensitive technology, materials and know how, and of international coordination in the application of national laws. Australia regards UN Security Council Resolution 1540 as a timely and appropriate response to the serious threat of WMD and missile proliferation, including the risk of non-state actors acquiring WMD. We urge all states to act quickly and with determination in implementing this historic resolution.

Mr Chairman

The destabilising accumulation, spread and misuse of small arms and light weapons continues to contribute to the breakdown of law and order in many regions. A priority for Australia is to assist regional countries to strengthen small arms control and enforcement capabilities. We were pleased to co-sponsor with Japan and the UN Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament a small arms and light weapons workshop in Fiji in August this year. We are exploring further opportunities to work with regional countries to promote the implementation of the UN Program of Action.

In pursuit of a world free of landmines, Australia continues to work to encourage universal adherence to the Mine Ban Convention. Australia calls on those states which have yet to accede to do so as soon as possible, and to make a clear commitment not to use anti-personnel mines in the interim.

Mr Chairman

The past year has provided significant security challenges but, has also seen some encouraging developments. Libya's very welcome decision to renounce WMD demonstrated that WMD programs can be given up peacefully, through open engagement, in ways which improve a state's future security. And the Proliferation Security Initiative, developed to impede illicit WMD and missile related trafficking, has evolved rapidly as a valuable reinforcement of and complement to the WMD treaties. Over 60 countries have now indicated their support for the PSI.

Mr Chairman

As we conduct our business in the coming weeks we must keep in mind that resolutions and debate are not ends in themselves. We need to look for ways to reduce the time spent on unproductive, formulaic work so that more effort can be directed to areas where we can make a real difference. The Australian delegation looks forward to working constructively with all delegations on practical measures to address emerging and existing threats to international security.