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United Nations Disarmament Commission

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Statement by H.E. the Hon. Robert Hill Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Australia to the United Nations

(Check against delivery)

Australia is a strong supporter of multilateral approaches to disarmament and non-proliferation and is committed to playing a constructive and active role in negotiations on these issues- effective outcomes from multilateral fora are crucial. The issues of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, as well as confidence building measures in the field of conventional arms, are essential topics for discussion. The UN Disarmament Commission has an important, and unique, role to play in this regard.

Australia would like to see real progress made across the disarmament and non-proliferation agenda including in this body. This Commission has debated some of the most important issues of global security, but meetings are not an end in themselves. The UNDC needs now, in this, the last session of the current cycle, to show it can help address today's most pressing international security concerns. Australia sees both of the papers recently circulated by the Chairs of Working Groups I and II as constructive contributions to the debate and is committed to engage actively to work towards consensus in both groups.

Mr Chairman

The international security environment has changed markedly in recent years. Globalisation has increased the need for vigilance about states acquiring or developing weapons of mass destruction. With the rise of trans-national terrorism, we confront the possibility of terrorists fulfilling their desire to obtain and use these weapons. Government strategies must be multidimensional, making full use of the range of tools in responding to this important challenge.

The major treaties and measures of the international disarmament and non-proliferation regimes such as UN Security Council Resolution 1540 are central to maintaining shared international standards. But Australia also strongly supports practical measures that reinforce the multilateral treaties, such as export control regimes. As many member states will know, Australia chairs the Australia Group which seeks to impede the proliferation of chemical and biological weapons. And from November this year we will take up the role of Chair of the Missile Technology Control Regime.

Australia has also readily embraced the Proliferation Security Initiative as an important new means to strengthen international cooperation on combating weapons of mass destruction proliferation, and we are pleased that support for this initiative continues to grow. We encourage those states who have not expressed support for PSI to look again at the practical ways it can contribute to the security of us all.

We take this opportunity to remind members that a strong international nuclear non-proliferation regime is essential to a climate conducive to progress on nuclear disarmament. Australia encourages all NPT adherents to respond robustly to the proliferation challenges typified by Iran and North Korea. Australia also urges all states to comply with, and implement fully, UN Security Council resolutions in this regard.

Like others, Australia considers that balanced and progressive steps towards nuclear disarmament are vital to the continued political strength and vitality of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Australia acknowledges the progress in the reduction of nuclear weapons arsenals and we encourage all Nuclear Weapons States to entrench this progress through irreversible reductions in all types of nuclear weapons. We also urge non-NPT states with nuclear weapons to take similar steps.

Australia supports swift entry-into-force of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and immediate negotiations on a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty as important disarmament priorities. We encourage all states, but particularly Nuclear Weapon States and non-NPT states with nuclear weapons, to support these important international instruments.

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty is the cornerstone of the disarmament and non-proliferation regimes. It is important that all NPT parties work to build on the qualified success of the 2007 Preparatory Committee at this year's PrepCom session to ensure a successful result for the 2010 review cycle.

Mr Chairman

Australia remains committed to addressing the proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons through the UN Program of Action. In addition to national measures to curb small arms and light weapon proliferation, we will continue to provide practical assistance to affected states in our region. Cooperation at the international level is essential, however, if we are to stem the flow of illicit weapons and reduce their devastating impact on peoples' lives.

Despite the enormous efforts of states to rid the world of anti-personnel landmines, they continue to pose a huge humanitarian threat and a barrier to development. In our previous role as President of the Mine Ban Convention, Australia strove to promote the

universalisation and implementation of the Convention through its President's Action Plan. In 2008 Australia will continue this work which makes such a positive and practical difference. In a further demonstration of our commitment to this issue, Australia has also recently announced its contribution of \$10 million to assist in de-mining activities in Afghanistan. This funding will help continuing efforts to clear mines, assist survivors and provide education to mine-affected communities.

Australia strongly supports the humanitarian goal of banning cluster munitions that cause unacceptable harm to civilians, and to that end participates actively in both the negotiations taking place under the 'Oslo process' and the CCW. Australia also provides significant mine action assistance to countries where explosive remnants of war, including cluster munitions, pose a humanitarian hazard. In response to the UN call for assistance, Australia has provided \$2.5 million to the UN Mine Action Service for mine clearance in Lebanon since 2006. Other support (in 2006/07 FY) to countries affected by cluster munitions includes: \$7.4 million to Cambodia, \$2.9 million to Laos and \$3 million to Iraq.

Australia, like other countries, is concerned about the potential threat to international civil aviation posed by the acquisition and use of shoulder-fired surface-to-air missiles or Man-Portable Air Defence Systems (MANPADS) by terrorist groups. Australia continues to work bilaterally, regionally, and multilaterally to help counter the illicit proliferation of MANPADS. These include efforts to enhance coordination of regional capacity-building assistance activities to help strengthen MANPADS export controls and stockpile management practices, and helping APEC economies with their 2005 Busan commitment to undertake MANPADS airport vulnerability assessments.

Australia believes that the irresponsible or illicit transfer of conventional arms and their components is of such grave and pressing concern that this can only be adequately addressed through the establishment of a legally binding treaty. Australia was proud to be one of the co-authors of the General Assembly Resolution on an Arms Trade Treaty. We have taken up our place on the Group of Government Experts with enthusiasm and purpose. This group is tasked with examining the feasibility, scope and draft parameters for a comprehensive, legally binding instrument.

Mr Chairman, the issues discussed in this forum bear on the security interests of all states. They are too important for all members not to embrace, in this the last session of the current cycle, this opportunity to make practical and pragmatic contributions to address contemporary challenges.

I thank you.