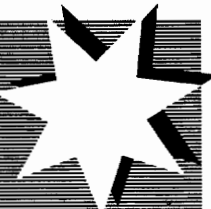




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**UNITED NATIONS DISARMAMENT COMMISSION**  
16 May 2009

**General Debate**

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

(Check against delivery)

Mr Chairman

The United Nations is one of the key pillars of Australian foreign policy and, as a long-standing supporter of multilateral approaches to disarmament and non-proliferation, we look forward to this session of the Disarmament Commission engaging in substantive, proactive and creative debate.

Since our last session Australia and Japan established the International Commission on Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament. The Commission – an independent global panel co-chaired by former Australian Foreign Minister Mr Gareth Evans and former Japanese Foreign Minister Ms Yuriko Kawaguchi – aims to reinvestigate the global effort to curb the proliferation of nuclear weapons and to secure further advances in nuclear disarmament.

Through the credibility of its membership, the quality of its arguments and the effectiveness of its advocacy, the Commission is seeking to bring a fresh and imaginative vision.

The Commission does not underestimate the magnitude of the tasks it faces. But the many positive reactions it has received suggest there is considerable international support for a commitment to a world free of nuclear weapons, and for practical ways to address the challenges of non-proliferation.

We are disappointed, therefore, that member states could not agree to invite Mr Evans and Ms Kawaguchi to address this body. The Co-Chairs had been advised that the UNDC was a significant part of the multilateral machinery for disarmament – this is unfortunately undermined by this disappointing outcome. This body should be encouraging open dialogue that can facilitate creative thinking, especially as we move towards the NPT 2010 Review Conference.

Mr Chairman

Australia warmly welcomes US President Obama's commitment to pursuing the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons. We strongly support his commitment to seek US ratification of the Comprehensive-Nuclear-Test Ban Treaty and to pursue negotiation of a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty.

Equally as welcome was the announcement by President Obama and Russian President Medvedev that they intend to pursue a legally-binding, verifiable successor treaty to the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty.

These developments, combined with the initiatives announced by France and the United Kingdom to reduce further their nuclear arsenals, augur well for nuclear weapon state commitment to the NPT.

However, there is more the nuclear weapon states can do. As a starting point, they must show leadership at the forthcoming NPT Preparatory Committee meeting and reaffirm their disarmament commitments under Article VI.

All member states must recognise the collective security benefits provided by the treaty – the near universal commitment not to acquire nuclear weapons and the only binding commitment made by possessors of these weapons to relinquish them.

All states must comply with their obligations under the treaty. I join other delegations in condemning strongly the recent DPRK launch. Australia endorses the Presidential Statement recently, and unanimously, adopted by the Security Council. We call on the DPRK to return to compliance with relevant UN Security Council resolutions and the PRST and to work to address international concerns about its missile and nuclear programmes. In particular, we urge the DPRK to work constructively with other members of the Six-Party Talks to realise the complete and verifiable denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula.

Mr Chairman

It would be remiss not to highlight the continuing emphasis Australia places on addressing the challenges of conventional weapons, including the proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons. In addition to national measures to curb proliferation we continue to provide practical assistance to affected states, especially in our region. Cooperation at the international level, including through the UN Programme of Action, is essential if we are to stem the flow of illicit weapons.

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. We were proud to be one of the co-authors of the General Assembly Resolution on an Arms Trade Treaty. We took our place on the Group of Government Experts with enthusiasm and purpose, and are now applying ourselves to supporting progress in the Open-Ended Working Group.

Australia and the Republic of Korea have also jointly promoted action in the General Assembly to alert member states to the proliferation threat presented by illicit brokering of weapons of mass destruction, their delivery systems and conventional arms.

Mr Chairman, the issues discussed in this forum bear on the security interests of all states. The global mood is swinging back to nuclear disarmament and the UNDC should not waste this opportunity to make practical contributions to address contemporary challenges.