Madame President,

It will be an important and welcome series of achievements when we begin negotiating, then conclude and finally bring into force a treaty banning the production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices in accordance with the report of the Special Coordinator of 1995 (CD/1299) and the mandate contained therein.

The conclusion of such a treaty will not be an end in itself; our work will need to continue. But a treaty banning the production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices will be a significant step in irreversible nuclear disarmament and a milestone towards our shared destination of a world without nuclear weapons.

It is of course a matter of longstanding record that Australia supports the immediate commencement of such a treaty. Since 2010, Australia has circulated in the Conference documents CD/1895, CD/1896, CD/1906, CD/1909 and CD/1919. All demonstrate Australia’s substantive and practical support for this proposed instrument, an instrument whose origins date back to 1946 and which paragraph 50 of the Final Document of SSOD 1 cited as one of the agreements whose urgent negotiation at appropriate stages and with adequate verification measures was required to achieve nuclear disarmament.

Madame President,

I will not seek to summarise the views contained in the various documents Australia has recently circulated in the Conference on this issue. However, I would like to take this opportunity to restate why a treaty banning the production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices remains important to Australia.

Such a treaty has the potential to deliver substantial security benefits, furthering the twin goals of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. By capping the amount of fissile material available for weapons use, such a treaty would be an utterly essential step towards irreversible nuclear disarmament. It would also further tighten controls on fissile material. And by imposing a quantitative limit on the amount of fissile material available for weapons use, it would complement the CTBT, which impedes development of nuclear weapons.
Madame President,

The polemics which have surrounded this proposed treaty continue to be a source of profound regret. No Member State of the Conference genuinely espousing the twin goals of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation has questioned the necessity of controlling fissile material for weapons purposes.

In this regard, it is important to emphasise again that Australia does not consider a treaty banning the production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices to be an end in itself. After the conclusion and entry into force of the treaty, the work to achieve a world without nuclear weapons will continue.

I would also like to emphasise that Australia does not believe that the issue of past production of fissile material, which is a legitimate question, should be an impediment to negotiations. Indeed, it is regrettable that there has been a narrative that that issue is the impediment to negotiations. Australia has not subscribed to this narrative.

Australia remains of the view that the Shannon Mandate, contained in CD/1299, carefully sets out the parameters for the discussion on scope which will need to occur in negotiations and would allow the widest possible range of actors to come, sit and talk at the negotiation table.

And even before we take that step along a much longer road, the establishment and maintenance of moratoria on the production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices remain vital. Production moratoria cannot substitute legally binding, irreversible and effectively verifiable commitments through a treaty. Nevertheless, existing production moratoria (and for that matter, efforts in facility dismantlement and fissile material disposition) do build confidence and send clear signals about the need to move beyond production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.

It is welcome that there are nuclear-weapons States which have declared their implementation of production moratoria. At the same time, regrettably, there are still States yet to indicate that they are not producing fissile material for use in nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices. And it is even more regrettable that production of such fissile material in some cases actually continues.

Finally, Madame President,

I wish again to put on record Australia’s strong support for the establishment of a group of governmental experts to consider this question in 2014 and 2015 in accordance with resolution 67/53, and also its strong interest in the GGE’s work.

This will be an opportunity to take an important issue forward. But even if our field of vision is narrower and focused just on the Conference of Disarmament, we should still all be viewing the GGE for what it can be – an opportunity to inform, guide and thereby support this once dynamic but now bleak house.

I thank you, Madame President.