Mr. Chairman,

I am very pleased to return to a subject that is of great importance to my delegation, that of the issue of verification in international arms control and disarmament agreements. As noted in our opening statement, the current challenges to the integrity of these regimes have underscored the central role that verification plays in assuring states parties that these instruments are in fact realizing the security they promise.

Verified compliance with arms control and disarmament agreements provides significant security benefits to the international community. We must continue to “trust but verify” precisely because non-compliance with arms control and disarmament commitments can seriously erode the trust so vital to their success. While verification mechanisms require significant resources, these are wise investments, considering the costs of alternative approaches such as the maintenance of large military forces. Furthermore, the continued potential threat of WMD, in particular to international peace and security means that questions of potential non-compliance will remain front and centre.

Verification, like military equipment, requires an active R&D program if it is to be kept up-to-date. Canada continues its tradition of funding advanced verification research through the International Security Research and Outreach Programme (ISROP) at Foreign Affairs Canada. We have also established the Canadian Centre for Treaty Compliance in conjunction with Carleton University in Ottawa. Launched in March of this year, the Centre’s initial focus has been on arms control and disarmament treaties dealing with weapons of mass destruction. One of the Centre’s first projects, undertaken with funding from the Government of New Zealand, was the production of a study for the international WMD commission chaired by Hans Blix on the future of UNMOVIC, and options for preserving its capacities and experience. This study, entitled “A Standing United Nations WMD Verification Body: Necessary and Feasible”, was presented at the UN this spring during the NPT review conference.

At the UN as well, verification has a long and distinguished history. The first UN Special Session on Disarmament in 1978 noted that adequate verification created confidence that arms control and disarmament agreements were being observed by all parties. In 1985, Canada initiated resolution 40/152, adopted by consensus, which called on all states to communicate their views on the subject. Then in 1987 and 1988, Canada chaired a Working Group which developed The Sixteen Verification Principles, which were subsequently endorsed by the General Assembly, and remain key expressions of international consensus on the topic. In 1990 and 1995, separate groups of governmental experts charged with studying the role of the UN in the field of verification reported back with recommendations. Some of these recommendations, I would note, have yet to be fully considered or acted upon. Following the 1995 report, Canada took the lead on First Committee resolutions reaffirming the Sixteen Principles.
The resolution presented last year (59/60) took a more activist role and established a panel of governmental experts to examine the issue in 2006 and report back to the First Committee. The Panel will begin work in January and will explore all aspects of verification as well as the role for the UN therein. I would like to lay out four possible areas of consideration for the Panel.

First among these would be a review of the conclusions of the 1990 and 1995 Group of Experts. This is consistent with the approach of earlier expert groups and will allow for an identification of areas of analysis that could usefully be updated to provide a longer-term vision of verification trends. This analysis could also be made broader by including results from some of the many studies in this area by the UN and other bodies over the past decade.

Second would be analysing and drawing lessons from recent verification experiences. WMD verification institutions, techniques and technologies have evolved dramatically in the past few years, and the growing technical competence of the IAEA, OPCW and CTBTÖ is widely recognized. At the same time, conventional arms sector approaches can provide valuable, often innovative, experience, such as the role played by the Landmine Monitor in the verification of the Ottawa Convention.

Third, the panel could look at how to improve existing mechanisms, whether by their universalization, or simply through better or fuller implementation. An examination of emerging technologies would also be important. New technologies and scientific developments may help the verification process but they may also be used to circumvent it, and both possibilities should be considered. As well, most verification systems were set up with state-to-state relationships in mind, and may need to be revisited, given growth in the importance of non-state actors.

Fourth, the role of the UN in verification. The UNMOVIC experience demonstrated the capacity of the UN to develop and maintain a highly professional, impartial, and effective verification organization capable of operating in even the most difficult political environments. It also shows the efficiencies that can be realized through cooperation and complementarity between the UN and specialized agencies such as the IAEA and OPCW. The issue of a standing multilateral verification capability has been actively considered by previous verification expert groups, and the 2006 panel may wish to examine whether this is an idea whose time has come.

The issue of verification raises challenges in many other contexts as well - the BTWC most prominently, but also the issue of national submissions under UNSC resolution 1540, and consideration of WMD delivery systems such as ballistic missiles (recognizing that these are not subject to a multilateral legally-binding control regime).

Naturally, we welcome further discussion and debate on this topic. In this respect I would especially like to commend the countries that have already contributed their views to the Secretary General in response to the DDA’s note verbale of 25 February, and encourage others to do so prior to January, so that the panel of experts may have these to consider as they begin their deliberations.

Thank you.