Mr Chairman,

1. Let me first congratulate you and the other members of the Bureau on your appointments and to voice our hope that, under your leadership, this Committee will have a positive and productive session. We meet at a troubled time for multilateral arms control. The failure this May of the 7th Review Conference of the NPT to agree on any substantive outcome had already cast a shadow over prospects for advancing the treaty’s goals of nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament. Last month, the inability of the UN Summit to agree a text on non-proliferation and disarmament gave further testament to the disunity of the international community. The Secretary General rightly decried this failure of political responsibility and admonished us to renew negotiations on this most vital issue. The weapons of mass destruction that threaten our existence have not disappeared, just because the Summit failed to find an agreed formula for referring to our obligation to curb their proliferation and effect their elimination.

2. As the situations in the DPRK and Iran have put into relief, failures of compliance with NPT undertakings adversely effect our common interest in sustaining the authority of the NPT regime and advancing its goals. Canada hopes that Iran will take the remedial action being asked of it to restore confidence in their commitment to the Treaty’s fundamental obligations, and that the DPRK will implement at an early date its welcome recent commitment to abandon nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs, return to the NPT and accept comprehensive IAEA safeguards. In Canada’s view, we will only be able to reinforce the existing non-proliferation and disarmament regime and advance vital international security goals, if we are able to renew a sense of common purpose and mutual respect in this endeavour. Such regimes are only as strong as their weakest link. It does little for the common good, if one country’s efforts to strengthen implementation of Treaty obligations is undermined by another’s neglect of its responsibilities.

3. In the NPT context, Canada has repeatedly pointed to the important role of the Additional Protocol in strengthening the IAEA’s ability to provide assurances of the absence of undeclared nuclear material. We must also, however, recall that the failure of 32 states to fulfill the basic obligation to conclude a comprehensive safeguards agreement with the Agency potentially opens up a huge vulnerability in the international safeguards system. Similarly, we must recognise the vital moral, legal and geo-political importance of full compliance by all states with their past commitments and the strict maintenance of non-proliferation and disarmament standards in dealings with all states inside and outside the NPT regime, if that regime is to continue to be taken seriously and to perform its vital protective function for us all.

4. Sixty years seems unfortunately to have dulled our memories of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Mr President. Must humanity relive these horrors to regain its resolve to eliminate such weapons once and for all? For Canada the answer is clear;
we have to re-invigorate our efforts and those of like-minded states world-wide to salvage the NPT as the core legal commitment to eliminating all nuclear arsenals and preventing the acquisition of nuclear weapons by new possessors. To promote such renewal of the NPT, Canada has proposed new arrangements, including the holding of annual Conferences of States Parties. Since the failure of the Review Conference has left us with the procedural status quo that would have rendered 2006 a dead year for the NPT, Canada is exploring the possibility of inviting NPT States Parties to a session next year that would address the reform agenda and go some way to make up for the time wasted this May.

5. In our view, recent setbacks in the arms control field should not lead us into despair or apathy, but rather serve as spurs to corrective action. In this regard, the impasse in the Conference on Disarmament has become unconscionable. We are therefore pleased that concerned states are developing initiatives – in Geneva, here in New York and elsewhere – to ensure that multilateral work on pressing disarmament tasks is not indefinitely stymied. The Fourth entry into force Conference of the Comprehensive (Nuclear) Test Ban Treaty was held last month in this building. There the 176 States signatory to this landmark accord reiterated their determination to bring the comprehensive ban on nuclear testing into full legal effect and appealed especially to those holding up entry into force to sign and/or ratify the Treaty as soon as possible.

6. Next year will bring major Review Conferences in three areas of interest to this Committee -- the first review of the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons, the sixth Review Conference of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention and the third Review Conference of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons. We believe that these meetings represent important opportunities to advance, in a tangible manner, the aims of these key agreements. Another chapter in the human security success story, the Ottawa Convention, will meanwhile be reached next month in Zagreb, when states and civil society partners will review progress in implementing the far-reaching Action Plan adopted at last year’s mine ban summit in Nairobi. In the WMD sphere, Canada is pleased with the continued momentum that has characterized the Global Partnership’s efforts to destroy the dangerous detritus of the Cold War, through its increasing activities in Russia and other states of the Former Soviet Union.

7. The current challenges to the integrity of international non-proliferation and disarmament regimes have underscored the central role that verification and compliance play in maintaining confidence of states in these security arrangements. Starting next January, Canada is pleased that a UN Panel of Experts will take up the subject of verification in all its aspects and the UN role therein. We hope that the work of the experts will yield practical results for this crucial aspect of international security commitments.

8. Finally, Mr. Chairman, we look forward to working with you and other delegations to ensure that this First Committee reflects the reform decisions taken last year and achieves a marked improvement in the effectiveness and value of its proceedings. Our delegation intends to contribute actively to thematic debate, which we hope will ensure a lively yet
coherent exchange of views on key topics and provide for interaction with UN officials, Working Group chairs and independent experts concerned with this Committee’s subject matter. As one aim of the reform effort is to shorten the General Debate and encourage brevity in opening statements, I will try to set a good example in this regard, by ending my speech now.