UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
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First Committee – Nuclear Weapons

Statement by H.E. Sally Mansfield
Ambassador for Disarmament and Permanent Representative of Australia to the United Nations, Geneva

(Check against delivery)

Chair

It has been an eventful year, with both positive and negative developments regarding nuclear weapons.

The US and Russia reached New START central limits within the agreed timeframe – but there is more work to do. An extension to that important treaty should be a crucial objective for both nations – and the international community. Both Washington and Moscow should resist allowing other differences to divert them from that key objective.

There is promising dialogue on the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, but a long way to go. Useful practical work continues on many fronts, including nuclear disarmament verification.

The international security environment is more complex and uncertain. Disarmament is more difficult yet more necessary.

These trends reinforce our conviction that patience, pragmatism and practicality – a “progressive approach” – is
the most sustainable and realistic way to move forward on nuclear disarmament.

Australia remains committed to the ultimate goal of a world without nuclear weapons.

There is much to do to achieve that goal. It cannot be easy or quick.

Always cognisant of the prevailing international security environment, we must address some crucial questions.

For example, what will deterrence look like without nuclear weapons? How can we make sure that deadly conventional conflicts do not become more likely? And what verification and enforcement tools would provide sufficient confidence that commitments to dismantle nuclear weapon arsenals are upheld?

We must discuss such issues and build trust and cooperation among nuclear weapon states and between those states and non-nuclear weapons states. This is a crucial challenge.

Fifty years after the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty opened for signature, it continues to enable access to nuclear technology for peaceful purposes. It constrains nuclear proliferation. And it provides the framework for nuclear disarmament, through the acceptance by all nuclear weapon states of legally binding disarmament commitments.

The NPT has delivered in so many important respects and continues to do so. It makes us more secure, and is a critical part of the rules-based order. We must continue to strengthen its implementation.

In under two years, NPT States parties will convene here in New York for the 2020 Review Conference, marking half a century since the Treaty's entry into force.

This is a golden opportunity to reflect in depth on past implementation, and on how we can do better in future.
With our partners in the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative, Australia looks forward to working towards 2020 with all States parties on further strengthening the Treaty’s review process, improving transparency and other vital issues.

Progress requires patient, difficult work – on disarmament verification, including through IPNDV; on a treaty banning production of fissile material for nuclear weapons; and on increasing transparency and other risk reduction measures.

Our shared interests in strengthening the NPT, and what it stands for greatly outweigh our differences. We must create space for dialogue and foster the political will needed to forge agreement.

Chair

We welcome this year’s significant efforts at dialogue on the DPRK’s nuclear program, and look forward to those efforts yielding positive and concrete results.

The Australian Government remains committed to the complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearisation of the DPRK. We will maintain economic and diplomatic pressure on the DPRK until it takes concrete steps towards this end. Ultimately, that will be to the DPRK’s own benefit and national interest, as a constructive, engaged member of the international community.

Turning to Iran, it is in our collective interests that Iran not be able to develop nuclear weapons. Iran too will benefit from addressing the concerns of the international community about its nuclear activities.

Chair

Strengthening the norm against nuclear testing through the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty remains a high priority. We encourage states to sponsor this
year’s CTBT resolution, which we are running with our partners Mexico and New Zealand.

Australia welcomes the increased use this year of disarmament forums like the Conference on Disarmament and the UN Disarmament Commission for important substantive discussions. For instance, we underline the timely priority given to exchanges on nuclear risk reduction – also highlighted as a priority in the UN Secretary-General’s Agenda for Disarmament.

We were pleased to chair this year’s UNDC, which laid the groundwork for a consensus 2020 outcome; and by the CD’s consensus adoption of some Subsidiary Body reports.

Australia champions full participation by both women and men in international security forums.

Chair

We advocate inclusiveness and steady incremental progress.

In the current environment, it matters more than ever to build trust, confidence and respect; to listen; and to include diverse voices. We can all improve our practice in these respects.

Thank you.