Statement for Cluster I (Disarmament)
Second Preparatory Committee for the 2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)
Geneva, 23 April - 4 May 2018

Mr Chairman
Australia maintains its abiding commitment to working towards the ultimate goal of a world without nuclear weapons.
The framework for doing so is the NPT, including its Article 6 disarmament commitments.
The security environment has deteriorated since we met last year in Vienna and geopolitical tensions have increased markedly. Confidence and trust building efforts are needed now more than ever.
An issue of keen and long-standing regional interest to Australia is the threat posed by the DPRK’s nuclear weapons program. Like others, we hope that current efforts at dialogue will lead to the DPRK taking concrete, verifiable and irreversible steps to denuclearise. But pending that, to this end,
maximum diplomatic and economic pressure must be maintained on the DPRK.

The ongoing implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) regarding Iran has shown that shared determination can lead to progress even in very challenging settings. We urge all parties to ensure their continued compliance with all provisions of the agreement. Australia maintains its strong support for the JCPOA.

In another WMD context, the abhorrent recent use of chemical weapons in Syria, Malaysia and the UK has underlined the need for vigilance on compliance with treaty obligations and accountability for violation of international laws.

Mr Chairman

In such a complex environment, there is the temptation to think it is all too hard, and to fall back on familiar lines, which do little to bridge divisions. That is not a viable way forward. Our task is to progress nuclear disarmament. We must instead focus on common ground and inclusive approaches, and reduce polarisation.

Affirming the Treaty’s centrality is essential for global security and the international rules-based order.
Mr Chairman

Australia is realistic about the challenges of achieving significant disarmament in the current environment. We can do this in a pragmatic, smart, concrete, and incremental way. This includes through the cross-regional Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative, which works to bridge divisions and find common ground.

Most recently, the US and Russia have reached their central limits under NewSTART, a positive development which should be acknowledged. The next challenge is how to ensure an environment more conducive to extending NewSTART.

We urge nuclear weapons states themselves to take the lead in demonstrating concrete results on nuclear disarmament. On nuclear risk reduction, we were pleased with recent useful exchanges in the UN Disarmament Commission which completed the first year of its new cycle last week. As UNDC Chair, we would welcome further UNDC progress on risk reduction as a positive contribution to the goals of the 2020 NPT Review Conference.
Mr Chairman

The NPT belongs to all of us, so we must all take a hard look at what we can do to rebuild cooperation and improve security.

For example, detailed work on elements for a future Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty will make a substantive contribution to future negotiations. As a member of the UNGA-mandated High-Level FMCT Expert Preparatory Group, Australia is actively committed to this issue.

Likewise, serious work on nuclear disarmament verification is essential. We support the UNGA-mandated Group of Governmental Experts as it starts its important work, and continue to work collaboratively in the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification to build our collective toolbox in this field.

In an environment of heightened tensions and uncertainty, we should prioritise transparency. We recognise that some nuclear weapons states have made significant efforts on this front.

National reporting by states on their implementation of the NPT and the 2010 NPT Action Plan is important. It is also important that our conversation about reporting is one that builds understanding. In this context, I commend to you the NPDI’s paper to
this PrepCom about transparency, which suggests how we might usefully focus on reporting during this review cycle and beyond.

We remain disappointed that the CTBT is still not closer to entering into force. However, its norm against testing is well-entrenched, and its verification mechanism is already exemplary. We have begun a conversation on provisional application of substantive CTBT provisions.

Mr Chairman
To achieve a sustainable world without nuclear weapons, we need to think more and talk more about what kind of world that will be, and about how to maintain it once it exists. This means engaging frankly about the role of nuclear weapons in security policies. Like many other states in today’s world, Australia relies on extended deterrence. One of the many challenges we face is to promote a world where countries no longer have the need to rely on nuclear weapons for their security.
We are now in a particularly challenging period for nuclear disarmament.

Nevertheless, we can take many practical steps – using a realistic approach focused on where we can achieve progress.

Thank you, Mr Chairman.