Statement for Cluster III

(Strengthening the NPT Review Process)

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

The purpose of this session is very practical. Australians tend to see ourselves as pragmatic so this sits well with us. It is our chance to speak frankly about ways to strengthen the NPT Review Process.

It is also an opportunity to be a bit creative within the framework of a consensus-based process.

The NPT belongs to all States Parties – and we have a duty to give serious attention to strengthening the Review Process.

There is no shortage of good ideas – from States Parties, as well as from think-tanks and civil society. We appreciate the detailed thinking that many have invested in this important topic.
Now it is our job to steer this ship in the direction of a stronger, a more effective, NPT review process – in a way that serves all our interests.

The 1995 Decision on “Strengthening the Review Process” is instructive. It tells us that Review Conferences should look forward as well as back, and identify the areas and means for future progress.

“Decision one” gives us significant discretion to explore ways to strengthen the NPT and its review process.

The Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative has kick-started this conversation through Working Paper 24 on “Action to strengthen the review process for the NPT”.

It highlights that the review process is not broken. Indeed, over several decades, it has contributed to major achievements across all three pillars.

But there are aspects that could be improved and we encourage all States Parties to make fresh efforts and give it renewed attention.

We think it is time to consider a dedicated process for further enhancing the review process. One way to do this could be through establishing a working group at the 2020 Review Conference to consider these issues.

A working group, for example, could provide a dedicated forum for advancing and debating ideas, so that States Parties can reach informed conclusions, and perhaps
compromises, on which changes would best enhance the review process.

We would welcome suggestions on the best way forward.

Even modest improvements are worthwhile, in view of the vital importance of the NPT. For example, summary records are expensive, and it is not clear that States Parties still need them in an era of improved on-line information. We would also see value in a dedicated transparency session at next year's PrepCom.

Two years out from the 2020 Review Conference, we still have time to make sure we set ourselves up for success in 2020. It is not productive to define success by our ability to agree one lengthy outcome document – which may not reflect the depth and value of discussions. We would prefer to see a more variegated approach to 2020 – which could result in a series of decisions or other forms of outcome document.

Mr Chairman

Gender parity and diversity more broadly help us to strengthen the NPT. We are encouraged by the growing interest in gender parity in the NPT – as shown through statements, and attendance at the side-event we organised with Canada, the Netherlands, and Sweden.
Australia has a steadfast and ongoing commitment to promoting gender parity, and the empowerment of women in the NPT.

Achieving gender parity is not just good policy but has the potential to enhance the capability and effectiveness of NPT processes and their outcomes.

Research has shown that more diverse teams are more effective, innovative, take more sustainable decisions and are more effective in resolving impasses. I commend UNIDIR's work in this field.

Australia underscores the importance of disaggregated reliable data in relation to gender, to provide the evidence base needed to make the right policy choices to strengthen the review process and the NPT.

The quality of the NPT review process and the NPT itself can only be strengthened by increasing the diversity of our perspectives, ensuring that we listen carefully to each other's views and look for common ground.

Thank you, Mr Chairman.