



AUSTRALIAN MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS AND THE CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT
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Australian Statement to the Opening of the 2023 Session of the Conference on Disarmament 26 January 2023

Thank you Mr President

I would like to join others in congratulating you on assuming the Presidency of this Conference. You take on the role at a challenging time and I would like to assure you of the support of my delegation for your work and the work of the other incoming presidents this year. My delegation would also like to take this opportunity to welcome all new colleagues who have commenced their work on disarmament in Geneva.

Mr President

The CD commences its 2023 session against a bleak international security environment. Russia's aggression against Ukraine and its desperate and reckless nuclear threats; Iran's refusal to comply with its non-proliferation obligations; North Korea's provocative violations of multiple UN Security Council Resolutions; and the opaque nuclear arsenal build-up occurring in the Indo-Pacific region - are all presenting significant challenges.

President Putin's nuclear threats underline the danger that nuclear weapons pose to us all, and the urgent need for progress on nuclear disarmament. Australia has always pursued a world without nuclear weapons, and we will redouble our efforts towards this goal and to strengthening the non-proliferation regime.

This week Australia marked 50 years since our ratification of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). The NPT's success in stopping the spread of nuclear weapons has been fundamental to global security over the last five decades. And as we face the most challenging strategic circumstances in the post-World War II period, the NPT remains critical to ensuring this security endures.

While we were unable to reach consensus on an outcome at the NPT Review Conference last year, we must nonetheless look to keep up the momentum and

build on the progress that we were able to make in the last review cycle. We need to look at ways we can build on the good discussions we had on nuclear risk reduction, which moved beyond zero sum debates into a more nuanced dialogue that recognises that nuclear risk reduction is part of nuclear disarmament and can contribute to international peace and security. Similarly, we need to build on the broad consensus reached on the importance of strengthening transparency and accountability.

To this end, Australia will continue to work with the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative (NPDI) and all states parties to pursue further progress in these areas area over the next review cycle. Australia will also be fully engaged in the Working Group on Strengthening the NPT Review Process. While reviewing our working methods is no substitute for substantive progress in implementing the Treaty, better process can ultimately lead to better and more substantial outcomes. The Working Group process will need to be inclusive and constructive if it is to succeed, so we encourage active engagement by all States Parties.

Mr President

Australia remains firmly committed to taking the practical and meaningful steps necessary towards our ultimate goal of a world free of nuclear weapons.

We continue to urge all CD members to agree to commence negotiations for a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT) at the earliest opportunity. We cannot afford to continue to delay work on this logical and vital next step in the long road towards ridding the world of nuclear weapons. Pending that, an immediate step that can be taken is the declaration and maintenance of a moratorium on the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons and other nuclear explosive devices. This is an important contribution that can be made to global disarmament efforts, unilaterally.

Despite some excellent progress toward universalisation in the past year, we remain deeply disappointed that the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) is yet to enter into force. We are determined to see it do so and renew our call on all remaining Annex II States to ratify without delay.

Australia will also continue to promote and seek practical measures in the area of nuclear risk reduction. While not a substitute for disarmament, risk reduction initiatives can make a genuine contribution to our security and

thereby assist in creating conditions conducive to progress on disarmament. Australia is therefore pleased to be co-chairing with the Philippines an ASEAN Regional Forum workshop on nuclear risk reduction in late March in Australia. We hope outputs from this workshop can be injected into the new NPT review cycle.

Another necessary step on the path to a world without nuclear weapons is the development of tools and processes necessary to give all states confidence that nuclear disarmament can be credibly verified. To this end, Australia was pleased to host the annual conference of the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification in Sydney in December, and looks forward to the report of the GGE on Nuclear Disarmament Verification later this year.

Australia is also committed to preserving space as a secure, safe and sustainable domain within the framework of international law. We consider that the key to limiting the risk of conflict in space is ultimately international agreement on, and adherence to, responsible behaviours. We look forward this year to continuing the important discussion on these issues in the Open Ended Working Group of Reducing Space Threats, the CD and the UN Disarmament Commission.

Mr President

To address the challenging international security environment, we need to use all the multilateral tools we have at our disposal effectively, including the CD. This means asking some searching questions about the way that we work and how we can make the CD work better. We cannot change things outside of this room, but we must do our best to ensure we use the time and resources we have in this room to best effect. Questions around how we work, who is involved in this work and the principles that underpin that work are all relevant

The consensus principle is a fundamental principle at the heart of the CD's work – it ensures that the vital interests of all members are protected. However, with that comes a responsibility to consider proposals on their merits. If we want the CD to be more effective, we must have a serious conversation regarding how the consensus principle is applied.

We also need to look at questions relating to our membership and participation more broadly. Australia will continue to emphasise the importance of mainstreaming gender perspectives in the way we approach peace and security,

arms control and disarmament. Like many other CD members, we will also continue to call for the simple, but significant, update to the CD's Rules of Procedure to reflect the equality of men and women. We will do this quite simply because it is the right thing to do and because it serves the interests of this body.

CD Members may recall that under Australia's Presidency in 2020 we undertook some wide-ranging consultations with CD members and observers on ways to make the CD more effective. We think now is the time to build on this work, and take a fresh look at these questions. We hope this is something the P6 can take forward this year and we stand ready to assist in this.

Mr President

Australia looks forward to working closely with you, the whole Presidential team and all CD members and observers, to progress our important work this year. We urge all members to approach our work with flexibility and a constructive approach – to look for areas of agreement, to build trust and confidence, and to engage in a serious discussion around how to make this body more effective – so that we can demonstrate to the international community that the CD can, once again, deliver the outcomes expected of it.

Thank you.