Australia’s Response to the Secretary-General’s Report on Women, Disarmament, Non-Proliferation, and Arms Control

RE: UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 77/55 | May 2024

Australia’s commitment to gender equality and the human rights of women and girls, in all their diversity, is steadfast and enduring. The full, equal, and safe participation of women in disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control, and the full implementation of Resolution 77/55, are essential for sustainable and equitable peace and security.

Achieving gender equality and the human rights of women and girls are at the core of Australia’s foreign policy and are necessary for stability, security, and prosperity. Linking Resolution 77/55 to related agendas – including the Women, Peace, and Security agenda and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – facilitates the achievement of mutually-reinforcing objectives.

In addition to the steps outlined in Australia’s last submission to the Secretary-General’s Report, Australia has taken further measures to implement Resolution 77/55 and promote women’s participation and leadership in disarmament, non-proliferation, and arms control, including but not limited to the following:

- Australia launched *Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality* on 7 March 2024, outlining the Australian Government’s vision for gender equality in Australia. This strategy will be implemented in a variety of different ways and is supported by the national Office for Women. Priority Area 5: Leadership, Representation and Decision-Making details the Australian Government’s commitment to ensuring greater participation and representation by women in leadership across Australian society. Priority Area 5 identifies the Government’s continued development of a new international gender equality strategy, which will recognise gender equality as central to Australia’s foreign policy, international development, humanitarian, trade, and security efforts.

- Australia continues to implement its National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2021-2031, including efforts to increase women’s participation and leadership in Australia’s security and diplomatic sectors. This work is supported by the advocacy of Australia’s Ambassador for Gender Equality and the Framework for Civil Society-Government Engagement. Through the National Action Plan, Australia supports and invests in initiatives to increase the leadership of women in peace and security processes. Examples include the following:
  - The Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF), in which Australia has invested since its establishment in 2016, invests in the capacities of local women-led, and women’s and girls’ human rights organisations to support
them to prevent conflict, end gender-based violence, respond to crises and emergencies and seize peacebuilding opportunities;

- Southeast Asian Women Peace Mediators and the Pacific Women Mediator’s Networks, which facilitate the participation and leadership of women mediators and negotiators in conflict prevention and peace processes in both Southeast Asia and the Pacific; and

- UN Women for implementation of its *Regional Framework Towards Peaceful, Inclusive Societies: Advancing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in the Asia Pacific Region*, which addresses priority WPS issues and emerging trends in the Asia-Pacific Region.

- Australia is proud to have women represent our country on issues of disarmament, non-proliferation, and arms control, in all levels of government, public service, civil society and international security forums. Examples include:

  - serving as Australia’s Counsellor to the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, Vanessa Wood was appointed in 2023 as Australia’s Ambassador for Arms Control and Counter-Proliferation,

  - Australia’s inaugural (2020–2022) Ambassador for Arms Control and Counter-Proliferation, Amanda Gorely, serves as Ambassador for Disarmament in Geneva, and

  - Female experts from government, civil society, and the private sector have been selected to serve on numerous international panels for arms control, disarmament, non-proliferation, and nuclear security, the most recent being at the International Conference on Nuclear Security (ICONS) in May 2024.

- Australia’s work, in consultation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), to apply nuclear science and technology to objectives in our region, has included the identification of practical initiatives to increase the representation of women in the IAEA and broader field of nuclear security. In line with paragraph 6 of Resolution 77/55, Australia has supported capacity-strengthening initiatives as one means of advancing gender equality and women’s empowerment. For example, Australia was a co-founder of the Group of Friends for Women in Nuclear Security, now in its seventh year, and has worked with the IAEA to fund scholarships and support women in the Indo-Pacific region enter the nuclear field through the Marie Sklodowska-Curie Fellowship Programme. Through the IAEA, Australia has invested in initiatives like the *Supporting Women for Nuclear Science Education and Communications* program to provide training to women educators in Asia and the Pacific to develop national programs to support education and outreach in nuclear science and technology.
• In line with paragraph 8 of Resolution 77/55, Australia takes actions to achieve gender equality and women’s empowerment, including through mentoring, networking, knowledge-sharing and capacity-building initiatives. For example, the Australian Embassy in the Netherlands hosted a Women in Diplomacy Mentoring Event to mark International Women’s Day in 2024. Ten leaders participated, including Australia’s Arms Control and Counter-Proliferation Ambassador, Vanessa Wood, who shared her personal experiences and advice on working on disarmament and non-proliferation issues. Over 70 early-career diplomats from every global region joined, including non-resident accredited Pacific representatives, whose participation Australia facilitated. Participants described the event as inspiring, innovative and of direct benefit by enabling mentoring and networking.

• Australia consistently and strongly supports joint statements and initiatives promoting gender equality and diversity within the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) framework, including at the Fifth CWC Review Conference in 2024. Australia supports gender equality efforts and gender mainstreaming within the work of the Organisation of the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). A core component of Australia’s work with the OPCW is encouraging a holistic approach to gender equality, including through our efforts to strengthen civil society engagement.

• The Women in International Security and Cyberspace Fellowship is a joint initiative of the governments of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the USA. The Fellowship embodies Australia’s commitment to tackle emerging threats through supporting women’s leadership in international peace and security issues related to responsible state behaviour in cyberspace. Launched in 2020 to address the underrepresentation of women in UN peace and security discussions, the Fellowship sponsors training in negotiation skills and cyber policy issues, and attendance at sessions of the UN Open-Ended Working Group on cyber (OEWG) for female diplomats from over 40 countries. Through the Fellowship, the percentage of interventions made by female delegates during the OEWG rose from 37 percent in 2020 to 48 percent in mid-2023. In December 2023, the OEWG set a record for the first UN peace and security forum to achieve gender parity in interventions in the 76-year history of the UN, when 55 percent of interventions were made by women.

Notwithstanding their critical work and contributions, women continue to be underrepresented in international security forums, particularly in positions of leadership, influence, and representation. There is much to be done by UN Member States to elevate and diversify women’s participation and leadership in international security forums dedicated to disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control.

Australia encourages Member States to recognise, promote and celebrate the contributions of women in disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control, both nationally and globally. Member States may wish to strengthen their understanding of gender equality as a cross-
cutting issue in international security and systematically apply intersectional gender analyses to all aspects of foreign policy.

Member States could also seek to support and strengthen our institutions and organisations to ensure diverse women’s full and equal participation and leadership in disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control, through targeted initiatives, networking and capacity-strengthening. This could include the provision of adequate resources for specific measures to advance gender equality, for the benefit of all.

In this regard, Australia welcomes working with Member States and United Nations organs, agencies, funds and programmes, as well as civil society, academia and the private sector, to further our shared gender equality objectives.