



AUSTRALIA



AUSTRALIAN MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

E-mail australia@un.int

150 East 42nd Street, New York NY 10017-5612 Ph 212 - 351 6600 Fax 212 - 351 6610 www.AustraliaUN.org

UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY FIRST COMMITTEE

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Nuclear Weapons

Statement by John Quinn, Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Geneva

Mr Chairman,

Australia is committed to the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons, pursued in an effective, determined and pragmatic way.

For Australia, reducing the numbers of nuclear weapons in the world is not only consistent with international obligations under Article VI of the NPT, but is also a key requirement for making the world a safer place. It is unequivocally in all our security interests, and in the interests of the very survival of humanity.

The disagreements among us are mainly over how best to achieve the elimination of nuclear weapons. Australia has consistently argued that short term fixes which do not engage those states that possess nuclear weapons are no substitute for the hard work necessary to achieve our shared goal of global zero.

Attaining this goal will require high-level political will on the part of all countries. But in particular, we need to find ways to get those states that have nuclear weapons to come to the table in a spirit of genuine compromise, and a preparedness to negotiate away these weapons in a process that contributes towards undiminished peace and security for all.

All states, especially the states with nuclear weapons, have a responsibility to help create the international environment where accelerated progress on multilateral nuclear disarmament is possible. We can help this process through concrete and practical measures, building block by building block, to ensure that real progress is achieved.

Australia, and its partners in the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative (the NPDI), regret that the 2015 NPT Review Conference, after so much hard work by many delegations, was unable to produce a consensus outcome. But we must not forget that previous consensus outcomes remain valid, including the final documents of the 2000 and 2010 Review Conferences and, most importantly, the 2010 NPT Action Plan. Their implementation in good faith by all Member States of the NPT is more crucial today than ever.

In particular, as a key pragmatic step forward, Australia has consistently argued that transparency by nuclear armed states on their nuclear arsenals and related developments is crucial for building confidence and setting baselines from which progress on nuclear disarmament can be measured.

Mr Chairman,

Australia welcomes the renewed focus on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons. It is in recognition of the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons that Australia has been so active in promoting effective disarmament and non-proliferation over many years, and why we must continue to work tirelessly for this cause.

We take a pragmatic approach to nuclear disarmament, which is why we do not support a treaty banning nuclear weapons. Such a treaty simply would not result in the elimination of nuclear weapons. States will only get rid of their nuclear arsenals when they feel it is safe to do so, which is why we also need to address the security dimensions of why states possess nuclear weapons. Eliminating such weapons requires much greater trust, as well as new and more effective nuclear disarmament verification processes. In moving towards a world free from nuclear weapons States will need assurance that these weapons have actually been eliminated, and that capabilities for developing new weapons are not being used for that purpose.

Mr Chairman,

We are collectively following a long and hard road. There are no short cuts to achieving our goal of eventual nuclear disarmament. Logical next steps are the entry-into-force of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, addressing the technical problems of verifying nuclear disarmament and beginning negotiations for a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty.

In this regard, Australia is pleased to present, together with Mexico and New Zealand, this year's resolution on the CTBT. With the 20th anniversary of the treaty just around the corner, it is more urgent than ever that it enter into

force. Australia also welcomes the work of the Group of Governmental Experts report on an FMCT and looks forward to implementing its recommendations. The GGE, in which we were privileged to participate also, constituted a useful confidence building measure. Further work on an FMCT should also be viewed in this light.

We call on the DPRK to abandon its nuclear weapon and ballistic missile development programs. These activities pose a threat to regional and international peace and security, and are in defiance of UN Security Council resolutions and the DPRK's other international obligations.

Mr Chairman,

In conclusion, Australia attaches great importance to the First Committee. It is a universal forum where we can harness positive developments, and build support for practical and concrete steps to strengthen efforts on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. Only through such efforts will we achieve the shared goal of a world free of nuclear weapons.