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UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

FIRST COMMITTEE

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General Debate

Statement by Senator Cory Bernardi

Mr Chairman

I congratulate you on your election as Chair of the First Committee during its 71th session. Australia is pleased to see you chairing this important Committee. You can be assured of my delegation's support, including in our role as rapporteur.

We are here to make a practical difference to regional and global security, to the lives of the people of the world who want to live in peace, security and prosperity.

Perhaps it is not surprising that when our objective is so ambitious, progress can seem frustratingly slow. Our shared disarmament objectives may also seem a long way

off, given growing polarisation in the international community, following the inability of last year's NPT Review Conference to agree on a consensus outcome, and in light of the continuing failure in the Conference on Disarmament to agree on substantive work.

But just because something is hard, and painstakingly slow, does not mean it is any less worth doing. If we are to realise our collective ambition of enhancing global security and stability, we must re-commit ourselves to the painstaking and unavoidable work of practical nuclear disarmament and confidence-building measures that engage all States concerned.

Mr Chairman

Our objectives are not only humanitarian but also to enhance the security of all States. Thus we argue that disarmament which leads to our collective goal of a world without nuclear weapons must involve all States, including those possessing nuclear weapons. In fact, nuclear disarmament expectations fall most heavily on the nuclear-weapon States.

Pursuing a separate treaty to make nuclear weapons illegal without the participation of those possessing nuclear weapons would risk undermining the security afforded by the NPT. It would also ignore current global security realities. By way of specific examples, a treaty banning nuclear weapons would neither convince a state like North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons program, nor help prevent nuclear materials falling into the hands of terrorists.

Over 45 years, the careful balance struck in the NPT has worked, providing real security and enabling societies to benefit from the peaceful use of nuclear technologies. Despite our different national perspectives on security, none of us should lose sight of the central, ongoing importance of the NPT to global peace and security, especially as we embark on the next five year NPT Review Cycle.

Nor should we relent in our pursuit of the critical steps which must be in place to secure nuclear disarmament. Notably, entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) remains a priority. The nuclear test moratorium needs strengthening to prevent slipping back to a time of nuclear tests. The CTBT is more than a practical commitment not to test nuclear weapons; it is symbolic of a broader undertaking to prevent the further development of them. Australia calls on nuclear weapon possessors and other Annex II countries that have not yet ratified to do so.

Mr Chairman

Turning to conventional disarmament, we welcome the momentum of accessions to the landmark Arms Trade Treaty, and encourage States to continue efforts towards universalisation. Australia is fully committed to continuing its work to encourage all states, especially those in the Indo-Pacific Region, to accede to this treaty, and to sustaining our assistance on ATT implementation.

Mr Chairman

Global terrorism continues to menace us on many fronts, involving many different actors. This year, Daesh are under increasing pressure - they are losing territory, finances and fighters. But we cannot take for granted battles won or progress towards peace and stability.

Australia is working closely with our friends and allies to destroy Daesh's so-called "caliphate" in Syria and Iraq. We cannot eliminate entirely the risk of terrorism, but we can mitigate it through sustained national efforts and international cooperation. We commend the enhanced efforts countries are taking to tackle terrorism, including new and deeper measures to address the causes of violent extremism.

Mr Chairman

Australia remains deeply concerned about ongoing reports of chemical weapons use in Syria and Iraq. We call on the international community to redouble efforts to: eliminate completely remaining chemical weapons stockpiles and production capabilities; prevent the acquisition, production and use of chemical weapons; and demonstrate its resolve to hold perpetrators accountable.

The UN – OPCW Joint Investigative Mechanism investigation has found that the Syrian regime was responsible for using chemical weapons against civilians in 2014 and 2015. There can thus be no doubt that the Assad regime has repeatedly used chemical weapons against its own people, in violation of international law, including the Chemical Weapons Convention and UNSCR 2118. We also note that the JIM report finds that Da'esh has also used

chemical weapons. We condemn in the strongest possible terms the use of chemical weapons by any party to this conflict.

As we approach the 8th Review Conference of the BWC we urge all Member States Parties to work towards consensus outcomes which will strengthen its operative Articles, and create an effective forward agenda for future action.

We also need to raise awareness of the emergence of new types of potential weapons agents. One particular concern is the use of aerosolised chemicals which affect the central nervous system in law enforcement scenarios. Australia welcomes the adoption of UNSC Resolution 2235 (2015) because it sends a strong unified message to treaty violators. Australia will continue working with others to ensure the realisation of these objectives which apply equally to the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC). This month for example, we will host a skills training course to build operational capacity in our region to respond to alleged use of a biological weapon.

Mr Chairman

Australia welcomes the continuing attention paid to cyber and space in the context of international security. In April 2016, Australia released its second national Cyber Security Strategy responding to the dual challenges of advancing and protecting interests online. We welcome the establishment of the 2016-2017 United Nations Group of Governmental Experts on Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of

International Security and Australia's selection for the Group. We encourage the Group to deepen understandings on norms of responsible state behaviour in cyberspace. And we look forward to the General Assembly's consideration of the outcomes of this stream of work.

The safety, security and sustainability of the space environment should be a higher priority for the international community, given our increasing reliance on space for our prosperity and development. Australia places a premium on practical and near-term steps to protect every nation's access to the space environment.

We welcome the agreement by the UN Committee on the Peaceful Use of Outer Space to the first set of guidelines for the long-term sustainability of outer space activities, which we see as an important contribution to space security, including in addressing the pressing issue of space debris.

Mr Chairman

Australians have a reputation for pragmatism, including in the multilateral sphere. We remain committed to playing our part and working constructively and with determination to achieve our shared goal of enhancing global security and stability through the work of this important committee.

Thank you.